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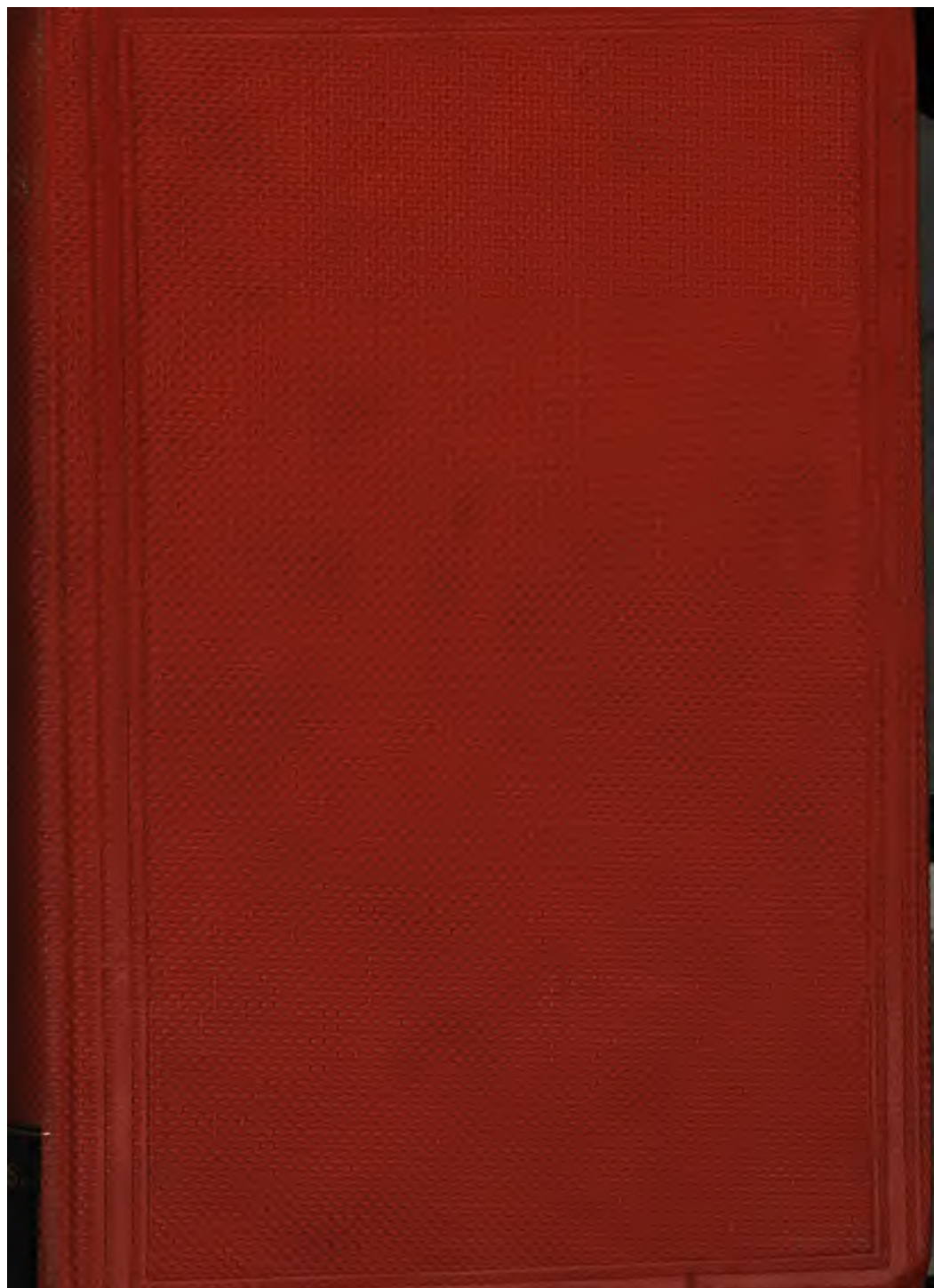
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LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

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LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

BY

CECIL HOME.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London and Cambridge.
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LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

CHAPTER I.

A BRIDE ELECT.

"OH Lesley, Lesley, will you never do anything but dream?—when there is so much to be looked to!"

She was sitting on the ground by the window, with one dingy threadbare curtain drooping half over her, looking out farther than sight, as one does with dreaming eyes that do not care to see. The sunbeams had left her, they streamed a pale good bye through the window at the other end of the narrow room, but she was in the dusk. Outside, opposite her, the clouds were dull grey above huddled housetops. Little beauty to gaze at with

such earnestness that she should not even hear her mother's fretting voice; but Lesley was dreaming.

"Child, where are your brains gone woolgathering now? Can't you hear me even?"

She turned round with an odd flicker of a smile, as if she smiled from the force of pleasant habit and not in unison with her mood now. She was very pretty, with eyes that not beautiful in themselves made her beautiful, of the grey colour of deep pure water shadowed on a sunny day, changing like the shades on water, and leaf-brown hair that would glitter in its waves under the sunbeams, and through which, even in that still light, the gold threads showed like a fine dust of metal scattered among the darker masses. She was fair and rose-cheeked, with an English face; but when she spoke there was an *echo* rather than accent of French, and she called her mother "thou."

"Did I not answer thee, dear mother?" She was fond of that sweet homely title, and, not knowing it was a vulgar one, chiefly used it when more fashionable daughters would have said *mama*.

"Did I not answer thee, dear mother? In Eng-

land I, who am not a great lady, must be married in a bonnet, must I not? But thou, surely, must know best."

"Why, Lesley! I asked you that and you answered a quarter of an hour ago! You really must not give way to this absence. What *will* Monsieur de l'Aubonne think of you?"

Lesley blushed painfully. "Little mother, thou must not scold me; we are to be separated so soon. I was thinking so much—so much—I did not hear that thou hadst spoken to me since. I am not happy when I think, now."

"Why not, little one?"

"I like thee to call me that, mama; it sounds kinder than our English ways."

Mrs Hawthorn came near and laid her hand fondly on her daughter's head.

"You are glad that we always speak English together, Lesley, and *my* English will not fit well to the *thou* you are so fond of. *Tu* is natural in French, but we are English."

"Yes, little mother, I am glad you made me an English girl."

Still Lesley sighed a little wearily, leaning her head against her mother's knee while she kept her seat on the ground at the end of the low couch by the window where Mrs Hawthorn had now placed herself. Mrs Hawthorn sighed too with a silent regret that her English girl would not also be an English wife. Mrs Hawthorn was always regretting: her life went on its own way, or somebody else's way, while she was still deciding how it had better be, and she remained pondering on the evils that reached her with a vague impression that there had been mismanagement somewhere, that if *she* had been allowed to rule matters all would have been well. She was not desponding or melancholy, but lamenting.

She had married a Frenchman and had been on the whole a happy wife, but there could not but be many a fret and jar from want of ethical congeniality and intercomprehension in such a union. These she bore in mind, and forgot to weigh against them the blessings that were and the un-blessed might-have-beens that were not. So, in spite of a very loving recollection of her husband

lying now in the cemetery of Mont Parnasse, she sighed that her Lesley should marry a Frenchman.

But she would have sighed more, and with, it may be, a little bitterness, if Lesley had refused her fine suitor with his title of Marquis and his rich prospects.

Lesley did not refuse him: she loved him.

"Little one," said the care-faced woman after a while, "you might tell *me* why you are not happy."

"I am happy, mother—only—only thinking is sad. I fear lest I should doubt Louis—which would be wrong, treacherous—when I try to foresee these things. And yet I *must* shrink from uncertainty."

"Are you uncertain, Lesley? you seemed so positive."

"Only positive that I love him, mama."

Lesley was half French, after all. English girls do not say "I love him," even to the kindest mothers. *Like, care for*, do duty for the word that, like some term of religion too sacred for common talk and made ridiculous by contrast if used except in prayer, is almost impossible upon their lips.

"Then you think him wrong, after all, to have you marry against the wish of his family?" suggested Mrs Hawthorn, in a doubting tone.

"Wrong? Oh no mother," cried Lesley, her face burning with her eagerness. "How can he be wrong not to marry a woman he dislikes and ridicules, to please them and secure her fortune?"

"But he need not marry *you* then."

"Ah, no," said the girl, sadly, "he need not."

Mrs Hawthorn felt hardly satisfied with the course the conversation was taking. Till now she had been much rested in Lesley's own innocent boldness through all this business. That Lesley should seem unsettled in her opinion now left her ill at ease. "But you forget, dear child," she said presently, "that Louis de l'Aubonne made almost a kind of vow to his parents that he would marry his *laide dorée*, as he calls her, or *some one else suitable*, before next year."

Lesley listened as if she had never heard it before.

"Yes," she said, in the tone that means "go on."

"And you see," continued her mother, "that, when they allowed him to say that about some other suitable person, they meant to keep the same check on him still by only consenting to his marriage with a rich woman."

"And I am poor," sighed the girl.

"Yes; and, as he says, under ordinary circumstances they could prevent his marrying you, as they will his marrying any body else, excepting this choice of their own—or some choice of their own—at any rate some one with money enough to tempt them to give up this one—which is not a likely thing to find. But you, being half English at the least and marrying in England, are independent of their consent. So that you are the only person who could save him from being forced, poor fellow, into what we English think the *sin* of a loveless marriage—A marriage for money—Ah, it's contemptible!" said Mrs Hawthorn, who on this point at least had a strong and settled opinion.

"Yes, it is true; we have said it many many times," said Lesley. "I shall save him where per-

haps his own will might be overruled by temptations and persuasions—if it were not that I do not believe even him when he fears that he could be brought to do that, since it is not honourable. But it is so different from all my fancy when I first knew that he liked me. He thought then his mother would receive me because it would make him happy. Ah, dear mother, it is so sad to know I am to make her turn away from him.”

“So it is—yes—it *is* unfortunate. And you know, Lesley, I always said that had to be considered. Yes, to be sure, it is she who is to blame—of course we should never consent to this now if it were not that they are driving him into a marriage that is hateful to him. That is his excuse in the matter, though. But *he* is very sure that this is the only way—as he said to me this morning, ‘Your daughter saves me from a whole life of unhappiness.’”

“Yes, and I lead him to outrage his family,” said Lesley, in a sad hushed voice. But immediately she added more quickly, “But he is indeed right ;

this restraint in such a matter over a young man old enough to judge of his own duty is wrong, is unbearable for him."

"Wrong indeed! and an extraordinary custom in a country where the little boys in tunics behave themselves like grown dandies and bow to you over their little formal speeches, as if they were so many actors. Ah, you should see our bright-faced English schoolboys, Lesley, at their cricket and football."

"I shall soon, perhaps," said Lesley, with a faint smile.

"Well?" Her mother returned to the subject left a moment for recollections of fair-haired little brothers who had long since grown into men and who, excepting one she believed, were dead now—brothers living and dying estranged from the sister who, wilful for once, or rather obedient to a dearer will than theirs, had let a foreigner persuade her to brave the resentment of her relations. The foreigner was poor, which made the resentment implacable. For Mary Lesley came of a grasping loveless race. But she herself had in-

herited some of the tenderness and even romance (so little like the Lesleys) of a gentle mother, who died before her daughter's marriage. "Well?" said Mrs Hawthorn.

It was a question put with no very positive meaning in the speaker's thought, but intended to draw forth some positive answer.

"I am pained, mother, remembering that happy brides should marry surrounded by their friends and be welcomed into their new life by second parents and new brothers and sisters, and I go to my wedding like a fugitive escaping from the laws, and his family will say, 'Louis is not one of us now.' And ah, if he should repent some day! He noble and born to riches to drag himself down to my humbleness and poverty."

"For humbleness," said Mrs Hawthorn, drawing herself up; "better families than your father's and mine they will not find among all their Gascon heiresses, although we *have* no title to claim."

"But they do not care to ask our descent. We live in a poor quarter as the poor live. I labour

hard to learn my art that I may support myself. What should these rich have to say to us?"

"That is true, child, and I have always told you I had fears about this marriage. Still, to marry at all, you *must* marry some one richer than yourself, and more or less makes little difference. Whoever he is he will remember that he had a full purse to your empty one, whether he had it filled with gold or silver."

"Louis will not count that way," said Lesley, proudly; "think, mama, he does not hesitate to lose all for me."

"Yes, *his* purse will not be overfilled, more's the pity. You will have to fight against the world till his father dies, and be but half well off then. And you don't know, Lesley, what it is to struggle against poverty in that way, when you have to keep up the appearance of luxuries and dare not allow yourself common comforts. *We* are willing to live like poor people and make the best of it: it will be a different thing, I am afraid, a very different thing, when you have a husband who never knew what it was to go without whatever he took

it into his head to want, and he feeling that his marriage has done it all. If he could only have persuaded his godfather! But we have gone so far now——”

“Oh, mother!”

“Well, Lesley, I only wish you to decide,” said Mrs Hawthorn, deprecatingly.

“Mother, we *have* decided.”

“*We*, no, little one, the decision was none of mine. I could not see any certainty of your welfare—and yet it seems foolish too to make him and you miserable for—But it was not I who settled it.”

“Mother, I have decided.”

“My dear child, remember what you are doing. You told me you were wavering just now.”

“I never wavered, mama. I was only sad.”

And Lesley Hawthorn rising drew the curtains over the windows through which the stars of the April evening were peering at her now, lit the little lamp on the table and touched the graceful bouquets in their small white vases into their most graceful effects to make the room look pleasanter

in the eyes of some one coming presently—some one who would hardly look at anything else in it, nevertheless, with her there.

She loved this Louis de l'Aubonne.

CHAPTER II.

MADEMOISELLE DESIRÉE.

OUT in the bright sunshine, brightening with it as she went, passed Lesley Hawthorn next morning through the irregular narrow streets that not even that pure-skied spring day could smile out of their heaviness. For she lived in one of the dingy streets of the dingy neighbourhood between the Palais des Beaux Arts and the Rue de la Harpe, and her way ran through a little labyrinth of like dingy streets. She was too young and too far removed in appearance from even the highest classes of workwomen to be properly entitled to walk alone in that great discourteous courteous Paris, but her English look seemed to explain it to the passers by, who thought (those who noticed her), "Tiens ! what strange freedom these young

English girls have ; it is wonderful that they do not abuse it!" and the confidence of her proud modesty protected her from annoyance. Now and then a compliment muttered beneath a moustache (the oftenest a grey one, too), caught her ear, or some blouse-clad workman or slouching soldier exclaimed in a louder tone, "Oh la belle Anglaise! comme ça est jolie!" but Lesley, who had lived all her life in Paris, was too familiar with such passing remarks, even when she was under all the certificated chaperonage for a young lady, to be disturbed, and no one attempted to address her directly. So she moved onwards blithely and fearlessly, in her simple print morning dress, with her little sheaf of brushes in her hand as a kind of proof that she was out on business.

She turned presently into a crooked short street which should have been called a passage. Here, the third of a row of tall gaunt houses, stood one which some centuries ago had doubtless been no contemptible residence for persons of an order that now ignored the very existence of this dilapidated old Rue du Gougeon, but which now

had its degradation written all over its dreary face. It was many stories high, with worn-down knots of stone tracery adorning its innumerable windows and a defaced stone shield, every trace of what had once been borne on it gone, over the low arch of the porte cochère, under which on one side the concierge's door, thrown open, allowed a view of a wide oaken staircase, very low and broad in the steps, with massive carved banisters. It looked poverty struck, with a kind of despairing helplessness that none of its less pretentious neighbours could imitate—a house that saddened you to look at, seeming, like that inexorable Mariner, to stop you in order to force sorrowful tales upon your thoughts and make you, if wiser, sadder too, and, as all such houses in Paris do, to be mixed up somehow with the crimes and the miseries of that weary Terror.

But, not to count the Sundays, there had not been many days in the last six years in which this young girl had not seen the decayed mansion, and it could not sadden her—pleasant thoughts belonged to it in her mind, and the pursuit which

for all that time, until she knew Louis de l'Aubonne, had been the chief interest of her life could not be remembered apart from it. She smiled to it unconsciously as if to a familiar friend, and ran lightly up step after step, higher and higher, only pausing to speak cheerily to the little brown-faced boys nodding to her from the threshold of one of the apartments on the rez-de-chaussé, and to caress more than one purring cat basking in the sunshine of the landing-window on their respective owners' stories, till she gained the troisième and the door of numero vingt. Numero vingt was hospitably open, and she passed in without knocking or announcing herself: she was always expected at this time, and always welcome at any.

"You are late, Mlle. Desirée," said Mde. Baudoyer a little acidly. Lesley was still nominally her pupil, and Madame had her importance to keep up in the eyes of the other pupils. And Lesley was at least half an hour behindhand, and this not for the first time that week.

"Chère grognarde," said Lesley, "I was kept

long from sleep last night, and slept late this morning to make up for it. You know I am not successful in my painting if I come fatigued."

"But how will you make an industry of your art, to live by it, if you allow yourself such idleness, careless child?" returned her monitress, who, already appeased as she was, had her part to play and would not drop beneath it.

"Then I must make my pleasure of it," said the reproved Mlle. Desirée, blushing at her own secret meaning, "and find another occupation for my industrious hours."

Mde. Baudoyer looked amazement, but while she was still shutting her lips tight to prepare for opening them to speak, the opportunity was lost.

"Is that our idle Desirée?" called a creaking voice from an inner room; "hasten her here, then, chère amie, I wait for her." And Lesley, carefully laying her little straw bonnet and black silk mantle on a ruined looking couch, where already lay three straw bonnets and three black silk mantles very like hers when off but very unlike

and inferior to hers when on, hurried to her impatient master.

Mde. Baudoyer remained in her amazement. No pupil had ever laboured so diligently as Desirée to master the mechanical difficulties of her art, determined as she was to make it "an industry"—none had shewn so decided an intention to abide by it through success and ill success. And the girl had been so proud recently when she had begun to have her earnings by her brush, small though they necessarily were as yet, she too, like her master and her rival M. Baudoyer, as she laughingly said. And now such a surprising fickleness! such a strange levity in one who had been accustomed to talk of her profession so seriously! Mde. Baudoyer recovered very slowly.

Then she arranged her red shawl carefully (Mde. Baudoyer would not have felt herself dressed without a shawl), shook its folds more evenly over her little plump person, smoothed down her bands of black and white hair with both hands, and looked earnestly in the bleared glass over the mantel shelf, as if to make sure that the dignity

of her appearance was such as might still impress her three busy pupils at their drawing-boards with the proper reverence, in spite of the shock she had suffered from her most promising young artist's surprising demeanour.

"Mesdemoiselles," she said solemnly, "Mlle. Desirée speaks heedlessly this morning, but I need not remind you that none have been more zealous in their course of study than she has. Permit me to pray you to follow her excellent example in that. And to you, Mlle. Elise, I may address myself the more urgently that my husband proposes, if you continue to display talent and perseverance, to bestow on you, as on Mlle. Desirée, the benefit of his own instruction.—I may mention that it is at her suggestion."

Pale Elise crimsoned with pleasure, and Lesley, hearing this harangue as she stood at her easel in the little room between Mde. Baudoyer's parlour and class room and M. Baudoyer's own painter's sanctum, thought, "Ah! I hope Elise will take my place and console these good people for the disappointment I shall cause them."

Pencils and brushes worked away busily for two or three hours: then there was an interval. The girls spread out their small lunches, brought with them, on their table; Mde. Baudoyer disappeared into unknown regions—*not*, you may be sure, into the sitting room, that carefully guarded salon which was only made use of at the new year and other ceremonial occasions. Lesley continued steadily at work on the copy she was making of her master's favourite Holy Family.

"Why did you not rest also?" asked Mde. Baudoyer of her as coming back through her husband's studio by-and-by she found her thus busy, while in the outer room the other pupils were laughing and chattering, even Elise not yet preparing to resume her work.

"I was not hungry or tired," answered Lesley, "and I am anxious to finish this copy."

"But you have plenty of time, Desirée; it is not expected to be finished before the beginning of next month.—My dear, you need not labour so to do that."

For Mde. Baudoyer felt a remorseful fear lest her little lecture had made the girl overtask her strength.

Lesley only smiled, a little sadly. Mde. Baudoyer went back to her pupils something uneasy, she did not understand her favourite to-day.

The day grew late, and one by one the pupils went to their homes, but Lesley remained. "To-day I will stay with you if you will," she said—"When it is later a friend will come to take me home."

"You are but too welcome, my child," said the old painter, who had come out of his den now, and "That is charming," said the smiling Mde. Baudoyer, all her little pompousness vanished with the pupils.

"Then I shall help you to prepare," said Lesley. And to and fro she went, arranging the room so as to allow some possibility of a table being spread for the dinner expected from the restaurant in the next street. For Jean the concierge, and his wife, who for a small stipend so far waited on the painter's housekeeping neces-

sities as to clean the rooms (when they were allowed to do so) and lay out the breakfast, did not consider the care of the dinner table among the duties they had undertaken. "Every one dines at a restaurant in these circumstances," they considered.

Lesley was used to her present operations. "Sit down, madame," she said with pretty imperiousness—"I do this to-day."—"Ah, no," she urged in answer to the good housewife's remonstrances, "I must do it all to-day—as if it were the last time."

"Desirée! what do you mean? You have a little tear on your cheek!"

"When we sit quietly after dinner I shall tell you what I mean. Now I must arrange—see, here is an angel who must leave off flying from that bar just over the table for a little, his wings would be in the soup.—I do not like that 'ecorché' opposite to me while I eat, that gives me an unpleasant feeling, let him go away into this corner, poor fellow.—I can sit on this chair without disarranging the folds of the mantle,

M. Baudoyer, but you really should not make lay blocks of *all* your furniture."

"What should I do then, impertinent?" said Pierre Baudoyer, laughing. "There was nothing else disencumbered."

"You must buy a great arm chair for yourself and one for your wife and a pretty chair for Elise, and you must put nothing on them but yourselves."

"I am not extravagant, child, as you know, and I am not rich yet—and Elise does not come to dine with us."

"But she will by-and-by—you must make much of her, she has more talent than I have—more genius, certainly—only as yet she has not been so much in earnest; and then you know you have taught me since I was a child. You will be proud of her when you have praised her a little so as to give her courage to work; you must think much of her to please me."

"And your chair, Desirée, what is it to be?" asked Mde. Baudoyer suspiciously. Did Desirée mean to leave them? she thought.

“How hard your room is to make neat,” continued Lesley, flitting about her task. “See, how can you sit with this easel right at your elbow as you dine? You would certainly knock it down, picture and all—and look, this pallet all over paint on the table where the dessert should be put till we want it.”

It was certainly hard to make that room neat. Pictures finished and unfinished were on the walls, on the ground, on the seats, everywhere; little stucco figures, serving by turns as angelets and cupids, dangled from the ceiling and in the windows; casts, some of them broken, were scattered here and there, among them that unhappy flayed figure to whose company at dinner Lesley had objected; draperies were artistically tumbled over the backs of the chairs and drooped from the doors, as studies for the work of either the Baudoyers or their pupils; the chiffonier was chiefly used to keep colour boxes and drawings in, and on which of the three tables, two with straggling claws square and short, and one with lank spider legs narrow and high, was the right

one for dinner, it would have puzzled any one without Lesley Hawthorn's experience to say, so encumbered were they with heterogeneous objects, models mostly for the pictorial studies continually going on in these precincts. But Lesley understood all about it, and by the time the little basins of soup were sent from the restaurateur's with the "portions" of meat, vegetable or pastry, which she, determined to do all herself, arranged on the small portable cooking stove to keep warm, her table was set out and looking as nearly comfortable as circumstances and the un-Frenchness of the word would admit.

"How is it you make my dingy room so smart all at once, little fairy?" asked M. Baudoyer, nodding to his wife to express his admiration of their favourite.

"English fairies are used to such work," answered Lesley; "that is what they do to reward those that are kind to them; but they come by stealth." "And then," she added softly, "a change comes suddenly one day, and they never come back to their work again."

“Desirée! you are going to leave us,” cried Mde. Baudoyer.

“After dinner I will tell you all about it. You will sit and talk with me, instead of your evening walk for once. I have to wish you good-bye for a little while, dear friends.”

“Desirée!” cried two voices at once.


“Chut! do you hear the dinner clattering up the stairs? I must open the door for it—No indeed I will not tell you till I have an hour, yes a whole hour to do it in.”

CHAPTER III.

LESLEY'S SECRET.

THESE three friends were sitting very silent ; the older pair looked at Lesley and thought, and looked at each other and thought, and looked at Lesley again. She sat on a low stool between them, looking into the fire, with her head leant on her hand in her favourite position ; some tears still lingered under her drooped eyelids ; the painter and his wife did not smile now for the mere looking at her, as they did before ; Mde. Baudoyer's plump cheeks were glistening damply, and her husband's face was a whole network of fretted wrinkles.

For Lesley had told her secret ; they knew now that she was going to-morrow with her mother to England, there to be married in three weeks' time ;



and, though she would return to Paris, their darling pupil was lost to them.

The evening was coming near now, and, although they did not suspect it, Lesley was already listening to every step on the great staircase, to recognize the one she was waiting for.

"So then we are in fact saying good-bye for always," said M. Baudoyer at last.

"Oh no, no, truly—shall I not still love my old friends?"

"It will not be the same, my child. You marry a nobleman, rich even as it is, even if he must lose the succession of his godfather—proud also. He is frank and friendly with the old painter folk who come from his country and knew him as a boy—almost as frank and friendly as M. Paul—but he will not have his wife one of us. We must accept things in their truth."

"But I too am proud," cried Lesley, "and yet—" the sentence was not easy to finish without injuring its meaning.

"There is pride and pride," said Pierre Baudoyer; "and how things must be one sees plainly.

And now will you tell us how this came to pass?"

"You know when I first saw him—that was when he came to pay you a visit the first time and said so pleasantly, 'It does me good to see my old friends again,' and took both your hands in his, yours and Madame's at the same time. That interested me in him, because he had such warm feelings. And you know his friend that had come with him to buy the picture never attended to what you were saying at all, but stared at me till I was pained, and made me impertinent compliments, but Louis turned to him angrily and muttered to him, 'Why do you not shew respect to this young girl, who you can see deserves it?' And though he scarcely spoke to me he shewed me a deference that flattered me. So, though I did not love him—as one says *love*—I did not forget him, and when I saw that a gentleman watched me from a distance whenever I came here I knew well who he was. After a little he used to meet me always when I came out from my home to come here and when I returned, and bow to me, fixing

his eyes. I returned the bow but always looked away quickly, for I was ashamed of his following me so. And yet, do you know, I am afraid I was not really sorry he did. But he saw that I did not mean to allow him ever to speak to me, so he ceased to meet me and without my knowing it he was always watching for my mother, to try to make an acquaintance with her. At last one day she dropped her victorine from her neck without knowing it, and he picked it up and followed her with it; and when she came to know where she had dropped it and how far he had come after her to give it her she could not but thank him very cordially; so it came that she seemed to know him when they met and they became as it were acquaintances. After that he contrived so as to join us when I was with her sometimes and to make a pretext for paying us a visit. Only when my mother saw what he thought of she grew frightened and pleased both at once and went one way one time and another the next, because she could not make up her mind about him; but it was too late to keep him from coming then. And I was

never frightened; I perceived the nobleness of his character too well. You know him, dear friends, you know what he is. So when he wished so much —when he said I held all his happiness in my hands, how could I refuse it to him? He will bring me back to France as his wife, and then his parents can no longer distress him about that hateful marriage with the ugly stupid heiress. And he says his mother is so gentle I shall soon be able to make her love me.”

“For the parents I do not say,” returned the painter; “but M. de Fourrère is not likely to be so easily appeased. And the best of M. Louis’s prospects will be lost with his anger.”

“Ah! Louis does not value fortune so much; he will still not be quite poor with his share of the family inheritance. And he says too his mother and his brother who loves him so much will succeed in pacifying his godfather.”

“Not so easily, my child; I know M. de Fourrère. But we will not speak of that; if M. Louis is content to risk that it is well; I at least know he gains more in you. But are you certain you take a safe

step in this marriage? It will be protested against by the family without doubt. Do *you* not risk too much?"

"It is an English marriage," replied Lesley confidently, "over which, since he is more than of age there—for he is nearly twenty four—his parents have no control. And *I* have my mother's sanction and presence. And it is quite seemly that I should marry in England; you know I am rightly English, since my father also was of English origin."

"You know this of the English marriage *surely?*"

"Yes; from Louis and from my mother both."

"Well then, you have perhaps not decided so unwisely—provided that M. Louis does not repine for the loss of the great inheritance from his godfather. If it were M. Paul only!"

"M. Baudoyer! you know M. Paul is not better, not warmer hearted than Louis."

"No; but he is lighter-hearted, my dear child, and never regrets."

"What I still dislike," interposed Mde. Baudoyer, "is this flying in the face of M. Louis's family."

"That pains me," said Lesley, sadly.

"That is bad," said M. Baudoyer speaking at the same moment; "yet under the circumstances one can excuse it—another marriage being forced upon him—and these young creatures love—"

"I do not approve of these love matches," interrupted his wife, getting cross under her vexation at losing their beloved Desirée; "they do not continue happy. Young people follow their foolish fancies in them instead of trusting to the experience of their friends whose age and discretion fits them to choose for them, and what can be expected from it?"

"My mother approves," murmured Lesley.

"Yes, to please you. It should be you who agree to her choice to please her."

"But she could not tell whom I loved."

"The folly!" ejaculated Mde. Baudoyer, raising her hands to express her astonishment at such a sentiment from a well trained girl; "and how could a young girl who respected herself think of loving a man before he was presented to her as her future husband? And of course she would feel it her

duty to love him when that had happened, and she would be quite safe then since her family had considered him suitable for it. But trust a young girl's prudence in such a choice! Bon!"

"Am I not then a young girl who respects herself?" asked Lesley indignantly, "I who loved Louis because he loved me?" Mde. Baudoyer softened immediately. "The best, the most modest child," she exclaimed, smoothing Lesley's shimmering tresses. But you have been brought up like an English girl, and love matches are esteemed among them. But it must be truly a dangerous system."

"Yet we have not been unhappy, my friend," said her husband sily.

Mde. Baudoyer started at the home thrust; it was shameful to attack her thus at such a moment, when she must seem to have pronounced her own condemnation; she fired at the outrage. "How! Do you mean to accuse me, Pierre Baudoyer? Why then should we have been unhappy? Certainly our marriage had no folly in it but was properly arranged for us by our relations. I am

surprised that thou shouldst wish Desirée to believe otherwise."

"But had I never danced with a young girl at a ball and trembled as I spoke to her? And had I never seen a face that was the prettiest and dearest I knew, and painted it in all my pictures till it became a jest that Pierre Baudoyer had only once seen a woman's face? And did no one always blush crimson when she saw me, and put white flowers into her hair because I liked them best on her?"

Madame Baudoyer was appeased again; her husband spoke with a certain tenderness in his teasing, and she remembered those old days as kindly as he: still she must maintain her reputation.

"That may be true indeed, but did not our parents meet and say, 'So much my son will have; so much is my daughter's portion—they will suit each other; he will be a great painter, and she, who has her poor little talent for his art, will be able to assist, working under him:' and so arrange

it all, before we said one word of our wishes to each other?"

"Yes," was the obstinate reply—"Our parents approved to please us—not, dost thou see, we to please them."

Lesley arrested Mde. Baudoyer's revived anger: "You will see Louis presently; he is coming to walk home with me."

"My dear! walk home with you! alone! a young man! But—" Mde. Baudoyer became breathless with horror.

"He is my betrothed," said Lesley quietly, though she blushed. "English young ladies do thus."

"But it is dreadful! it is immoral! What does your mother say?"

"She asked him to come for me that I might stay a little while later with you. It will be beginning to grow dusk now when I reach home."

A knock sounded on the door at the moment, and a hard yet pleasant tenor voice demanded admittance.

"You see me, my friends, come to steal Desirée from you," said the young man laughing.

"Ah yes, M. Louis, you must always accomplish every fancy," said Mde. Baudoyer a little pettishly.

"Are you cross with me, dear lady?"

Mde. Baudoyer wanted to say Yes, but her affection for Louis, whom she had known from his boyhood, and her conscientiousness reduced her to answering No. "He is so handsome and so pleasant," she thought, "who could vex him?"

He was very handsome and very pleasant, no wonder he had taught Lesley to love him. She felt proud of him as she looked at him conversing so winningly with the painter and his wife and drawing from them so naturally the congratulations with which she had been unable to inspire them. He was tall and slight, with deep passionate eyes, and dusky curls tumbled over a low broad forehead that had an odd way of wrinkling as he talked but when he was in repose was marvellously smooth and white for such a rich southern complexion as darkened redly over his cheeks. The

over-fullness of the upper lip was the only flaw noticeable in the beautiful face, which however, though of a noble masculine type, had in it a want of calmness or decision or some such expression looked for on such boldly cut features, so that it reminded one of a passionate woman. The grace of his manner was something to be seen, and his words flowed with all the animation of the Gascon and the grace of the Parisian, only, though all he said was happily turned and had the slight epigrammatic point of an accomplished and clever Frenchman's talk, he was evidently grave natured and probably easily brought to exaggerate his more serious thoughts into melancholy. And this tendency, which Lesley divined, was her chief anxiety on his account; but she thought, "I will watch, and keep all sorrow from him," and believed the hope.

"You will have a bouquet in your room to talk to you about me on Saturday three weeks?" Lesley said, as another farewell after many farewells, to her old master. "Why have you never flowers in your room now they are blooming again?" she

added, perceiving that the old man's lips trembled too much to answer her yet. "You, who are a painter, should love to have beautiful things round you."

"They are dear, are they not?" said M. Baudoyer. "But I do not know—Marie, why do we never have flowers?"

"Wouldst thou not have scolded me if I had spent money on them?" replied his wife. "And we are so busy how could we find leisure to miss them?"

"Ah! if our little one, our angel Marie, had remained to us we should have been reminded of such things. Now we will always have them for Desirée's sake."

Lesley turned quickly to go, afraid of giving way again to her tears and vexing Louis. "Remember my flowers on Saturday three weeks, still," she left behind her as her last words.

But the old painter remembered to keep flowers in his room constantly, as he said, for Desirée's sake, and when the sweet violets he received as her good-bye message the next morning had to

be removed from the little vase they came in, and be folded away to wither, treasured up in honour of her, he made his wife replenish it through the season till all the violets were gone. For he was not by any means too poor to indulge in such little luxuries, and greater too, rarely as he allowed himself to step out of economy's straightest path.

"Why is it?" said Lesley to her lover as they walked towards her home, "these kind people love me best because I seem like their child to them, yet it is you who persuade them? Before you came they did not like our marriage."

"I like to persuade people, my beautiful Desirée, so I have cultivated the art."

"But was that needed?" thought Lesley. "Who would refuse to be persuaded by him?"

CHAPTER IV.

LOUIS'S SECRET.

IN Paris the old painter was, with his own hands, arranging the huge bunch of choice flowers that was to do honour to his best pupil's wedding day. In London Lesley, weeping and smiling at once through happy blushes, seated by Louis de l'Aubonne's side, was driving home from the little French Episcopalian church where her marriage vows had just been pronounced.

"My darling! art thou as happy as I?" he exclaimed, kissing the newly placed ring under the little white glove.

"Yes, Louis," she said simply, looking into his passionate eyes with her bright confiding smile lighting her whole face. "I am happy and proud to be your wife."

"Not happiest that I love you so?"

"The two things are one," she answered softly.

She looked so innocently lovely. Unpretending as their wedding was to be she had had a sweet half superstition about her dress for it; it must all be of the purest white; so there she sat in lily raiment, with the soft clouds of drapery gathered round her, looking fairer and more girlish than ever. She was very young and, though she was tall, did not look much more than a child.

"Thou art so beautiful, my Desirée!" he exclaimed, "I cannot bear it!"

She smiled half wonderingly, "It is too late now, you must resign yourself to it."

It was not too late, but how could she suspect it—as yet? In the carriage following them, Mrs Hawthorn sitting opposite the fashionable person engaged as the young bride's maid, who had been taken to the wedding to make one more in that small company, had arrived at the pleasant point of ceasing to doubt of the event before she had begun to regret. "I am thankful indeed," she thought, "to see my child so happily settled and

with one to whom I am not afraid to trust her. Now I can begin to live without always asking myself what will happen to her if I die."

Ah! careful mother, your cares are not over yet; perhaps the worst are to come! Ah! pretty Lesley, in your young happiness, if it were only to drive on so together to the end of life! That would be happy, you would think; but what will you say of what awaits you?

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Louis as they drove up to the hotel again, "there is my brother!"

Looking out from the coffee room window was a merry face which, if it had not been merry and set in light brown hair and with a sandy moustache instead of a chestnut one, would have been Louis's, but which, being what it was, Lesley at once understood to belong to M. Paul de l'Aubonne.

"For the love of Heaven, Desirée," cried Louis, "do not let him discover that it is from our wedding we return."

"But my dress, will it not betray it? And after all it would be no better if he thought we had been longer married."

"True, your dress—what should one do?"

"Must you not tell him the truth now, just as you would have done in a little while on our return to France?"

"Yes, yes," was the hurried reply, "I must tell him the truth; Paul is my very good friend. You will go to our apartments with your mother, Desirée, and I will come to you after I have spoken with him. Perhaps I shall bring him."

"Do, he looks *gentil* and I long to be on kindly terms with your brother," said Lesley, with such a tender little stress on the *your*. And she stepped lightly out of the carriage and tripped upstairs before her mother, not in the least afraid of the result of the interview between her husband and his brother. For the secret would not have been long kept at any rate, she reflected, and it was not amiss that this kind Paul should be the one of the family to hear it first: he would announce it considerately to the others.

Paul was contemplating himself in the glass when Louis entered; he remarked, in the tone of one addressing the companion of the last half

hour, "I am as handsome as thou, Louis, *mon brave*,—why do the women not perceive it?"

Louis drew back, wounded. "Paul, no warmer greeting after months of separation?"

Paul made a rush at his brother's two hands, which he pressed vehemently amid a whirlwind of protestations too affectionate for an English taste but after their fashion sincere. He would have liked to embrace him had not that custom become ridiculous and of the old world now among young men of civilized habits. Louis, graver-natured as he was, was hardly less demonstrative in his greeting, and something like tears trembled alike in the brown and in the blue eyes. Then Paul's gaiety returned. "I thought it but right to model myself on the Englishman here in his own great dull city, my brother, and the Englishman of well-regulated mind does not disturb himself for a few months more or less of separation from his nearest friends. Here one's brother comes back again one fine day, after his monument has been erected at home, and one nods to him pleasantly and goes on with one's Times."

"Thou hast not had much time to assure thyself of that, however," said Louis laughing.

"Pardon me: in England one economizes time; no moment is wasted; and I have been here ten thousand five hundred and eighty moments precisely—ah! no, I perceive by my watch that I have overstated by one moment. If we set out on our return together this evening I shall still be enabled to fill a volume with the observations gathered from these valuable moments, since they go farther here than with us in France."

"Then thou hast come on my account."

"Have I said it to thee?"

"No, truly. But we have beaten about the bush long enough; let us come to realities."

"Here?"

"I think so—we are private enough—to ask for an additional room might be to disturb the minds of those ladies."

"I have one already, but it is next to thine, which we must pass to reach it—that would be embarrassing if those ladies should be watching for thee."

"We are private here for the moment—even if any one should enter we have our protection from curious ears—let us talk here," said Louis hurriedly, "only let us not lose time."

"Good. Then, I am come, I fear too late, to warn thee from thy ruin. Just Heaven! hast thou married this girl?"

Paul began his speech in French, but concluded in the patois of their birth-place. Such a change was familiar to the brothers, who were thus enabled to pursue their most intimate conversations unchecked by the entrance of strangers. And a quiet formal looking gentleman had just come into the room, who, Englishman as he plainly was, thought Paul might understand something of mere French.

"And if I had!" rejoined Louis in the same mysterious jargon.

"Then adieu to thy prospects. Take a name of the people, my friend, and hide thyself in the Faubourg St Antoine to live on thy handiwork. Thy beauty can sew, I suppose; she may perhaps earn your breakfasts. But dost thou understand

that the paternal fortune is embarrassed? We inherit a charming collection of debts; and we must look on their rarity as the enhancement of our napoleons."

"Mon Dieu! Paul! art thou sure? Art thou telling me no more than the truth?"

"Very sure, unfortunately. And thou knowest I never break our compact of candour with each other on all subjects. I will explain the particulars if thou wilt; but business details are little to thy taste, and will tell thee no more than I say, and it will delay us perhaps suspiciously from those ladies."

"Pass for the present. I must believe thee, Paul."

"Good. Then consider, wilt thou well, that our father's health fails rapidly; at his death the impoverishment of the estate becomes known; thou hast a mountain of debts already, and thou wilt no longer be able to raise money. How then wilt thou live? I imagine that love and clear water are after all an insufficient diet for a man who has been accustomed to dine à la carte."

"The godfather is so feeble his fortune will soon come to me."

"But he will never forgive thee this folly; thou knowest him; one might blow away the Luxor by talking, before his resolutions. Parbleu! he is so obstinate that even death cannot get the better of him whilst he chooses to stay in the world. At present he proposes to live until he sees thy affair settled to his fancy. And thou knowest that he is bent on thy uniting the estates of our *belle laide* to his. And, in truth, if thou wilt not marry Stephanie, still a fortune, and not a small one, with thy wife will be necessary to save the estates of our family, since he will have disinherited thee on the refusal. The very chateau will go from us without some purse to attach to it."

"He is losing his memory, he lives out of the world, why should he know? A little pardonable deceit—"

"He knows too much already, my poor friend; and I myself must tell him the certainty I discover. Some one, whom I cannot guess, but thou mayst know the enemy, has written to him an

anonymous letter. He persisted in sending some one after thee to verify the information : therefore I offered to come that he might not employ a more dangerous emissary. But I have been compelled to pledge myself so solemnly to him and to our mother, that I must give them true information."

"Tell him then and ruin me."

"Not of necessity. Art thou aware that this marriage is void, is in fact no marriage for thee?"

"Certainly, I am aware of it." Louis's face crimsoned with sudden strong emotion, and then grew fearfully white; he shuddered as he spoke, but he repeated with trembling lips, "Certainly, I am aware of it."

"And then?" said Paul.

"I cannot part with her! I cannot, Paul! I would rather die; kill me before thou tearest me from her."

"And the godfather's fortune?" said Paul, with a little flicker of a laugh in his bright eyes.

"Mon Dieu!" groaned Louis, hiding his face in his hands, and so remaining, shaken with sobs, in silence. Paul's eyes filled with sympathizing tears,

but he suppressed his emotion, remembering that it would appear ridiculous to an Englishman, and that the formal elderly gentleman might by some fatality be tempted to look up from his paper at that inopportune moment.

"I cannot part with her," repeated Louis at length, "I cannot part with her."

"Dost thou then propose to recognize her publicly as thy wife and compel our parents to contest the marriage according to their protest?"

"That would give some delay at least," said the drowning man, clinging to his straw.

"And the godfather's fortune?" said Paul again.

The straw floated away. "Mon Dieu!" gasped the drowning man again, and again there was a silence.

"But what hadst thou contemplated as the end of this affair, in resolving on the step thou hast taken?" inquired Paul, determined to bring the conversation to some positive issue.

"I do not know; I thought there would be time enough for decision afterwards," was the low reply.

"Thou must have certainly felt that thou wouldst

have to explain the true position to her eventually?"

"I feared it at least."

"Then thou wilt but have to carry out that idea a little sooner. I can make excuses for remaining two or three days, thou wilt have time to prepare her for the blow and to reconcile her to the position of affairs. Then I shall tell the godfather that the young person does not claim to be thy wife, and all will come right."

"Then I should lose her for ever. I tell thee death would be preferable, my brother."

"It is tiresome," said Paul earnestly; "I cannot tell lies to the godfather; for I am convinced that he has a spy in my servant, whom he himself gave me for the journey on pretence of his being useful from his experience of England. The fellow will tell all I conceal. Canst thou not persuade her to allow her marriage to remain a mystery for thy sake? Thou couldst provide her with a home here or secretly in Paris. If she would but seem to deny the marriage in the presence of this traitor of a servant all would be safe."

"She would suspect the truth; she would think I meant to desert her. It would drive her to despair."

"Thou couldst give her a hope that thou wouldst acknowledge her and legalize her position on the death of M. de Fourrère."

"That I certainly should do."

"Never be too certain. Possibility is enough for a sane man to contemplate. What thou *will* do in this matter is nothing (and doubtless would be nothing in the fact when the time came), but what thou doest now is what requires decision."

"Am I calm enough to decide?" said Louis, bitterly.

"Quite, mon cher. Especially when the choice is so limited. Own the whole truth, and, as thou hast said, let it announce a parting (which indeed would be best), or tell her part of the truth and persuade her to secrecy."

"But how can I ask this of her? Thou dost not know her. She has a horror of dissimulations and concealments. And she will not submit to a dubious position."

"And has she no generosity then, thy chosen love?" asked Paul, surprized. "Canst thou not prevail on so young a girl, who loves thee, to make this sacrifice for thy sake? She does not then comprehend the holy devotedness of love. And after all, what dost thou ask of her at present? she, who is of English family, is thy wife, according to the ceremonies of her religion and in this country, and thou canst show her truly that, by consenting not to be openly recognized as such in France for a while, she leaves room for thy being able to conciliate thy family and legalize the marriage there, of which otherwise thou hast no hope. If she is obstinate thou must tell her this."

"But she must not know she is not my wife according to our law—"

"Ah! mon cher, we are but going back on the old ground. I say, tell her this if all else fails. But it will not come to that; one can trust something to the pure unselfishness of a woman's heart when love has enlarged and inspired it. Now let us talk no more of it, but go to her; she will be suspicious of our delay."

"Not yet," said Louis, drawing him back. "Let us talk of other things before we go to her, that I may not have the consciousness of this painful discussion still on me when I answer her tender smile. And tell me also to whom will M. de Fourrière leave his fortune if he withdraws it from me."

"Naturally to me; which would make thee safe in spite of thy escapade, thou understandest, but that the old man resolves to bind me to share no portion of it with thee. He has the two wills, one on each side, always by him, and asks himself at every moment which he shall confirm. I have persuaded him to delay his decision till my return. He is not fond of me since I personated him so successfully at that fancy ball and that malicious Mère Badaude carried him the report; but at least he considers me incapable of the folly of a love match with the dowry omitted. I am on my best behaviour to him at present on thy account. But then it is a difficulty that I must not refuse his offers too positively, lest he should take offence altogether and send for that bourgeois grandson whom his daughter has left to the charity of the

relations of her lowborn husband. He proposed to me the other day that I should marry thy rejected lady, and the idea smiled to me, for she is not so disagreeable after all, and what a dowry! But it must be to carry out his plan of uniting the estates, and I cannot take the lady without taking also thy inheritance from the godfather. It is hard on me, for Mlle. Stephanie seems not ill-disposed to me herself."

"Paul, what temptation thou art placed in. Canst thou indeed resist it?" said Louis doubtfully.

"Still that suspicious character! Canst thou imagine that I could be a traitor to our affection? I sacrifice thee to my interests! Louis, I should not doubt thee thus."

"Forgive me, I was wrong to think of it for a moment," said Louis, holding out his hand for a grasp of reconciliation. "And now," he added, "before I present you upstairs tell me the news of thyself since we parted."

Paul's history of his proceedings in the last few months took some time—he had been desperately

in love twice, and was in fact still despairing from the last attack—he had written a wonderful poem, part of which he must recite—he had lost much money at play, and by miracle in one night repaired his losses—he had made four never-to-be-equalled friends and quarrelled with two old ones. “Ungrateful hearts, disloyal to their affections,” he sighed,—he had bought a horse and broken its knees, of which accident however it had recovered so well that he was inclined to think the animal benefited by it, as it would doubtless learn caution from it and avoid careless steps thereafter.

Then at last they went upstairs.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

LESLEY was trying to persuade herself that she did not wonder why Louis was so long away from her, and assuring herself that she was rejoiced that his affection for his brother should be so strong as to make him thus lose count of time in conversing with him. "Oh no, not yet, mama," she had just answered to Mrs Hawthorn's inquiry from the next room if that step heard on the stairs had not been Louis's. "They must have so much to say to each other."

But the step which had passed the door came back again, as if some mistake had led it onwards, and, heavy as it was, she began to think it must be Louis's, and her heart beat quickly, for it

sounded slow and alone, and where then was Paul de l'Aubonne, and what evil tidings could he have brought? But she was startled by a knock at the door and the appearance of an unknown visitor.

He was a tall spare man with straight grey hair and scanty grey whiskers in spite of which his face gave you a peculiar suggestion of its being shaved—the recollection of razors and shaving-brushes seeming forced upon you; perhaps the exceeding length of the upper lip caused that effect of bareness. He wore a remarkably high collar starched into a perfect wall about his throat, and an exact black neckerchief rolled twice or thrice round and primly tied. He looked altogether the very caricature of a precise Englishman rather over middle age. He saluted Lesley with a bow which contrived to combine the not easily combined qualities of being very stiff and very low, and by that performance and the ultra shaved look showed that he was a Frenchman of that exceedingly respectable and exceedingly dull type which is seen sometimes among the precise of “la haute bourgeoisie,” and which to the eye of a Frenchman

not perfectly familiar with the peculiarities of English appearance seems thoroughly English. But, although she was a stranger to her own countrymen, Lesley's English instinct was positive on her visitor's nationality, and she at once connected him in her mind with Paul de l'Aubonne's arrival. A strange feeling took possession of her that she was about to hear some terrible intelligence, and making quickly to herself the sign and prayer of the cross, which was all the Romanism with which her foreign life had imbued her, she summoned up all her fortitude.

Her visitor, who perceived her sudden pallor, wisely allowed her time to recover herself before he addressed her, speaking then with a calmness beyond even his wont and far different from what he felt in his honest heart, in hopes thus to assist her in retaining the calmness she had assumed. Nor were his good intentions wholly unavailing ; Lesley's presence of mind never once forsook her. I think presence of mind rarely does fail in great agonies ; it is to the sharp small pangs it succumbs.

"Mademoiselle," said the formal man, "allow

me to apologize for intruding upon you, and to assure you that I do so only out of respect and consideration for you."

Lesley bowed and glanced at her bride's dress, and then at the ring on her left hand—her visitor had said "Mademoiselle" in spite of them.

He perceived her thoughts: "I have the honour of addressing—?" he paused.

"Madame de l'Aubonne," Lesley answered.

He shook his head portentously, but continued with his most decorous politeness: "I have to present myself to you as Simon Gueret, banker, lately resident at Nantes and now on a little tour in England before settling myself in the first city of the world, our beautiful Paris. Should you consider it necessary, after you have heard the information I approach you to convey, I can, by letters in my possession and by reference to respectable merchants of this city, prove to you that I am a person worthy of credence; but in the meanwhile time presses, and my story is, alas! such as will prove itself true from the mere circumstance of my being able to tell it. Permit me,

Mademoiselle, to request you, if your mother is at hand, to summon her."

Still under that first idea of the connection between this visitor and Paul's arrival, Lesley complied with the request. Mrs Hawthorn appeared in flutter and surprise, but "Do not question, mama," said Lesley; "it is safest to listen."

Simon Gueret had, as he informed them, a singularly accurate memory; he could report the details of a conversation all but verbatim, providing no unreasonable length of time for the recollection of it, if unimportant, had elapsed—or, if it were important, whatever length of time had elapsed. Now, with the details fresh on his mind, he related what he had just overheard in the coffee-room. "They were conversing in a patois with which, from residence in one of the mentioned departments in my youth, I am conversant," he said; "and, as they did not check their conversation when I entered, it did not at first occur to me that they imagined it to be private to themselves,—and these Gascons chatter their affairs to anybody," interjaculated M. Gueret, almost warmly, giving way

to a private antipathy for an instant. He resumed however his sober speech immediately: "Therefore, when their conversation prevented me from practising deciphering my few English phrases in the journal, I did not refuse to listen, and when I perceived the subject of their communications I made it my duty to listen without their perceiving it, in order to frustrate their wickedness. I trust you think me justified in doing so."

"Oh, surely," said Mrs Hawthorn, scarcely knowing what she did say in her anxiety for his stay.

"I hardly know," said Lesley, speaking as if in a dream. "I have not had time to think of it."

M. Gueret went on: "These two young men were brothers; one is named Louis, the other Paul; I have not heard any surnames in the history excepting that of M. de Fourrière, the godfather of the taller and darker brother, Louis. They said thus.—And he rehearsed their conversation, just as they had spoken it in words, but with the uninterested tone of a schoolboy over his grammar, until Paul's fine speech about the

unselfishness of a woman's heart had closed the discussion so far as it touched the young bride ; "and," said he, "hearing them resolve to calm themselves by talking on more indifferent subjects I perceived that I had time to warn you of your unfortunate position."

Mrs Hawthorn sat stunned and speechless. And already every sound seemed to announce the coming of the brothers ; every minute seemed that which must bring them ; there was no time for consideration, yet something must be done.

Lesley's face was scared and blanched, and a resolutely suppressed emotion was evident in her very attitude, as she stood, her arms held stiffly down her sides, the hands clenched with a strain, and her head thrown backwards with a movement of pain ; but she found a steady voice to say, "I shall ask Louis if this is the truth, and—" she wished to add, with a feeling that it was her duty to trust him, "he will be able to prove his honour," but she could not bring out the words : there was a frightful air of truthfulness about Simon Gueret's story, and if—

"Are you angry at our delay, my queen?" asked Louis de l'Aubonne, gaily beyond his wont, entering with Paul. "You must blame this brother, whom I present to you."

"Is he *my* brother?" asked Lesley gravely, almost sternly.

"If it were not too great a happiness for me—" Paul was beginning, when he suddenly caught sight of Gueret, whom he instantly recognized as the person who had been reading his paper near them a few minutes ago, though Louis, who perceived him at the same moment, only marvelled, a little crossly, who this stranger Englishman might be and why he was there with Desirée and her mother. Paul's dismay fairly choked him. M. Gueret bowed; Louis returned the salutation: "May I ask whom I have the honour of receiving?" he asked him.

But it was Lesley who answered: "M. Simon Gueret, who is my witness; for I have to ask you, am I lawfully, in France as in England, your wife?"

Louis staggered backwards; Paul almost shriek-

ed: they looked at each other as if for some means of escape from the question. Each saw in Gueret an emissary of M. de Fourrère's, and M. de Fourrère once made an enemy was an implacable one. It was no longer possible to deceive this girl.

She, poor thing, saw her answer, and a sickness like death crept to her heart; but she must hear it too, and she had nerve enough to repeat her question.

"Yes or no, Louis? Am I your lawful wife?"

"No," replied Paul, not from insult or cruelty but to save his brother the pain which the first step costs.

"Louis," repeated Lesley, "am I your lawful wife?"

"No," murmured, almost moaned the young man with agony on his face and every limb quivering.—Ah! it was done, he knew she was lost to him! But he added, "Not yet," though M. de Fourrère's agent should hear.

Mrs Hawthorn caught the "Not yet," and echoing it with an hysterical burst, began, "What *yet* can

there be in such a matter? do you think you may—" But Lesley hushed her before she broke down in a sobbing fit, as she was on the verge of doing: "Dear mother, let us only know the truth—then we will say no more to him."

But she too had noticed the faint "Not yet," and asked him: "You say *Not yet*; had you then any means by which you would immediately have made me so?"

M. Gueret turned his solemn visage on Louis, who, remembering M. de Fourrère, was again driven to answer "No."

"Is it his fault?" Paul exclaimed; "he had no power to do it."

"And you knew that you had no power?" asked Lesley of Louis.

Again the presence of M. Gueret seemed to compel him to criminate himself: he must answer "yes" in spite of himself.

The girl's face was white with a great anger; "Oh the infamy!" she gasped, tightening her trembling hands over each other, and went hurriedly to the window. She wanted a minute's shelter

from observant eyes, a minute's hush to gather again the strength that began to fail her.

But Louis followed her impetuously, seized her hand, threw himself on his knees, imploring, raving, "Oh, pardon me, pardon! it was my love for you—have you no pity, no love? Was it then all feigned? Desirée, you will not leave me? You will not kill me? Does your heart plead nothing for me?"

At last she turned her face to him; "What do you want of me?" she asked slowly.

The terrible directness of the question silenced him: for what indeed could he ask of her? He knew that this marriage, contracted without the consent and even in the teeth of the prohibition of his parents, was void, and how could he, in the presence (as he believed) of M. de Fourrière's agent, cry out, as he was one wild moment tempted to do, "Be yet my wife, I will renounce my country and adopt your's." Could he even ask her to remember their troth till time and his strong resolve should bring it to a happy fulfilment? Not many young men had fairer worldly prospects than he

had as it was, not many would be more at daggers draw with fortune than he if he renounced them: he could not sacrifice so much to a love-longing.

She looked at him sadly, "There is no more to wish now. We must bear the wrong you have done me, both you and I—now let us part, for always."

But her quiet despair revealed to Louis de l'Aubonne his true position and her's: for he knew that her despair was not for herself in this misery he had brought on her, but for him, because he was so low beneath her pride in him and had burdened his life with dishonour. Now first he felt plainly that this was not an evil fortune come upon him but a shameful thing which he had done, and by the light of her sorrow for him he saw his treachery towards her and shuddered to think of all that lay before her—her desolate anguish, her long regrets, bitter memory accompanying her—perhaps the pain of bodily suffering, for she did not seem strong, and grief is hard to bear—perhaps the agony of a blighted name.

He wept at her feet: "Oh, what have I done!

And you, cruel, why are you so patient ? Reproach me, spurn me, hate me—Hate me! My God! Desirée, will you not love me still?"

She checked him gravely—Paul loathed her for her insensibility. "Do not let us talk more of love; it is for us to forget. I will pray God that I may not love you."

"Cruel! revengeful!" cried her lover (he *was* her lover in spite of all). "Pray rather that he will make you merciful—you abuse your power, you make me suffer because I love you—but suffer!"

"Have I reproached you, Louis?"

"No, no," he groaned, "I reproach myself. Forgive."

"Ah! I forgive."

"Only for pity's sake leave me a little while," she added wearily. She was faint with suppressed emotion; she had put a cruel force on herself to play her part calmly, and the scene was repulsive to her. She did not understand passionate melodrama.

"Oh go, go!" she moaned, as she still vainly tried to disengage her hand scorched with his

kisses. "Oh, monsieur, you who are his brother persuade him to go for his own sake. Can you bear that he should be seen thus?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle," Paul replied indignantly, "I will lead my unhappy brother from one who is incapable of generosity and of sympathy, and I will seek to console him, with a devotion which your selfish rigour cannot comprehend, for the arid heart he has lost."

Lesley made no answer. Released from Louis's grasp she sank on a couch, her face buried in her hands. One last look Louis turned to cast on her in the hope that she might recall him for at least a kinder farewell, but when the door closed on the brothers she had not stirred.

"I will retire if Mesdames permit it," said M. Gueret. "May I venture to hope that when you have decided on your arrangements you will inform me, in order that I may have the honour of offering you my most willing assistance?"

Poor Mrs Hawthorn, overwhelmed and bewildered, was only too glad to accept his offer. Lesley still had not moved.

But when they were left alone she came quietly to her mother and knelt with her head on her mother's lap. What was there for her now but to weep? Yes, long, very long and bitterly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEDDING RING.

AGAIN Lesley was gazing out at the housetops in the narrow Paris street, but there were no last sunlights now; the evening was glimmering into the night dusks, and at every moment another star looked down on the great city aglow with its gaslights, careless of it with its far off tremulous radiance. The hubbub of a quarrel rose and then calmed below her, leaning motionless in her high window, and the passings and bustlings of the noisy evening of a large town sounded up to her, but she was only aware of herself and the black roofs and the darkling sky with its white stars looking at her. All the day she had sat listless and silent watching her mother's movements without the courage, or, as it seemed to

her, the power, to think; and now, on the plea of weariness, which not herself but her anxious mother had found for her, she had come so early to her little sleeping room,—but not to sleep; she was taking the rest of solitude. Even that kind maternal presence was a thing to escape in the girl's sorrowful mood; she could think now, for she was alone.

“Alone.” She murmured the word with a sense of its relief. But then she was reminded of its bitterness. Would it always be thus? Was her love too great to die? Must she, day after day and year after year, bear it with her, a curse upon her life, a long secret regret coming between her and her world, oppressing her with a feeling of inmost isolation? Why could she not cast aside all thought of it? After all she was but now as if she had never known Louis de l'Aubonne.

Ah! no; he had come into her life, they had come into each other's lives; come what would henceforth they were part of them. And because he had known her this miserable humiliation had

come upon him, he had done so greatly wrong. Could she be blameless, since without her the evil would not have been? Why had she not, with righteous maidenly indignation, silenced for ever his first half words of love? But no, they whispered pleasantly to her heart, and she had made a seeming of not understanding them and had let him repeat them, strengthen them, unrebuked. As if she did not know that to love her was a fatal thing for him! Why had she only tried to draw back (for his sake, always for his sake), when it was too late? Nay, why had she thought it too late? why had she yielded to his long pleadings and in her vanity been persuaded that it was for his happiness to forego so much rather than forego her with her mere beauty and love for dower? She ought to have fled out of his reach and been a stranger to him for ever when she knew all: but she had remained and had been willing to have him forget all his prospects, forget his duty to his parents, for his love of her. Why, why had she let him love her? Why had she loved him?

No, her loving him was not a fault, that she

could not have helped : he asked her for love, *how* he asked ! she could not but love him. Who could have been strong enough to refuse *him*? How handsome he was—not handsome, but *beautiful* as a Greek god. How noble he had been till now, nay how noble he still was ; for could one fault corrupt for ever a high generous nature like his, and did not the very wildness of his passion in that cruel parting, terrible as it seemed to her then, show how far he was above his fault? A meaner heart would have judged it lightly, a colder would have borne calmly, but Louis had been stricken down with anguish. And there was something lofty too in the way in which he had answered her fatal interrogation ; no evading, no excusing ; a simple No and Yes, that confessed all. Yes even now, fallen as he was, if she, separated from him for ever, knew that no other love could come to brighten her life, it was that no other could seem worthy after him. Whom could she trust since *he* had deceived? Ah ! never again, never again. And it had been so happy to love, so happy to think there was one to whom she was so

much,—all. Did he not say *all*, with that deep tremulous voice of his and that long shadowy gaze, that it made her heart leap and stop suddenly in its fluttered beatings to hear and to feel? It was strange she did not know whether it was pleasure or pain most to recall that sensation now, to seem to listen anew to the fond words which used to be echoed by her heart again and again so often in her reveries while she would wonder why they meant to her so much beyond many like them in tender phrase which he had spoken too—but surely not with such a tone, not such a look. One by one she recalled those exquisite moments; it would not be wrong to allow herself that indulgence, it was all that was left her. Yes, all, even if she were to hear love from his lips again, and he should come back to her prepared to redeem the wrong and give up all for her sake. He might do this, he was capable of such heroic repentance, but she must yield no more; not though he should pray to her as if for dear life, and, watching her night and day—

She started from her seat; her excited fancy had

made her see in the overshadowed figure of a man leaning in the archway of the house opposite Louis de l'Aubonne watching as she had pictured. She knew it was but a wild fancy, and it frightened her that it had come; she shuddered to think that even for a moment her trouble had so disordered her imagination.

"Good God! if I were to grow mad," she gasped as she left the window. But she smiled at herself already as the words left her lips; she could trust her own self control.

She drew down the blind and lit her candle, with the smile, a bitter quiet smile new to those soft lips, still on her face. Then she sat down to think before the glass. It seems that women always do sit down before the glass when they intend thinking, that thinking I mean which is feeling; why I do not fathom, though I ponder it sometimes: perhaps the quiet presence within the frame lessens the sense of loneliness; perhaps the pitying face conveys a sense of sympathy. Or does the presentation of contours and features and shadows and of expression unguarded utterly now, give

unconscious witness unconsciously received of the hidden things of the soul and their untraceable but, doubtless, sure causation-linkings to the outward destiny; as it might to some seer-sighted physiognomist allowed such an impossible opportunity? If none of these, then what is the spell? for, though the happy beauty may gladden with her own loveliness and smile afresh for the very joyousness of the smiles she sees reflected on her there, swelled eyes and a weary face are not pleasant to look on, and the trouble-sick woman, half loathing her life, can have no delight in her sad-browed counterpart that should bring her before it to watch her own mournful thoughts passing across its face.

Lesley did not know, neither did she question, why she went to the looking-glass to think; but the other natural thinking place, the window, having failed her, she went there as a thing of course. And she looked at it too and thought, as she had never allowed herself to think before, "Yes, I must be pretty: I am pretty even now, after these cruel hours." Before, you see, she had shrunk from vanity; but what vanity could there

be for her now? "How strange it is, I look so little changed and I am, oh, so different; my old self is gone quite and for always: *now* I wonder what it is like to feel happy." This was her next thought, as she saw how the young face, perplexed with its distress, was yet so soft and fresh. Seeing it thus gave her an odd impression of unreality in her grief, as if it must be something vague and illusive that showed so little outward trace; the change in her was but the stupor of callousness perhaps, her real phlegmatic nature revealed to her now in this emergency; she had no deep feeling, she had hitherto only imagined it, built it up out of what she had heard and read of it in others, what her girlish romance made her wish to possess. She felt pained at her own apathy, but it was evidently part of her true character; all she had hitherto flattered herself was courage and self-reliance in her, all that fancied presence of mind, was mere heart indifference, mere paucity of emotion. And as she came to this conclusion she wondered more and more at the quick tears streaming down the face she was scanning.

"I have deceived even myself," she said aloud, distinctly, listening to herself as if it were some other speaker whose meaning she had to follow. "I am a good actress, playing my part even alone, till I believed in it myself: but I have no feeling; Louis once told me so, and he was right; I suppose I did not love him in reality; I do not care about losing him; if I could undo all this I do not think I should try. If anything could make me suffer thoroughly, deep down, it would be this; and at heart it leaves me quiet. I only weep from excitement; I care as much as ever how I look; I find out that my hair is parted a thread away from the middle; if I were in earnest I should not see that."

And she took down the shimmering coils of hair, and loosened them into long wavy masses over her shoulders, and very carefully made a new parting, straight and narrow, like a white thread losing itself into the white forehead. Then she fastened up the coils again, not quite as they were before, but in a new style (she had seen it somewhere in that unfortunate visit to her own country), which

she had thought might be more quickly done and look more graceful. And she studied the effect quite seriously: for the moment she really believed that she cared. She despised herself for her heartlessness.

Then it frightened her. "Have I grown imbecile? Has this shock weakened my intellect, and left me only the power of thinking of trifles? Can I feel at all?"

And then she tried to excite herself to some sorrow, not for her real trouble, *that* she knew could not move her, but for imaginary miseries, the most overwhelming she could picture. One after another she called them up before her eyes in the most vivid detail, and one after the other she turned away from them unmoved. "I am too cold," she said. "Even this would not agitate me."

She imagined her mother dying—dead, and even then she said: "Miserable that I am! I should hardly suffer; see I can contemplate the possibility calmly." She could not arouse any emotion in herself.

"It is horrible," she said, "horrible! I seem made of stone. Am I indeed, as his brother said, of so arid a nature? Or are my faculties leaving me?"

She was too new to grief to suspect that her unnatural apathy was mere exhaustion; that knowledge only came to her afterwards with the experience of many such nights.

"Can I think?" she asked herself. "I *must* think to-night. To-morrow the old life begins again.—The old life? the *new*, the cruel new life aping the old. To-night I must think."

But apparently she could not think. She had to decide a question which seems a slight one, but there was meaning in it to her beyond its material import, meaning too dim and visionary too involved in half superstitious sympathies for her to be able to set it clearly before herself in her present, or perhaps in any mood, but very perceptible nevertheless. And the question was what should be done with that ring on the third finger of her left hand.

Why! return it, one would think, nothing simpler

than that. But as it happened that could not be done, not done yet at all events, for Lesley knew not where her husband (it seemed to her as if Louis were yet her husband while she wore the ring) was to be found, and she was aware, moreover, that, even had she possessed that information, it would be a dangerous step to begin a communication of any kind with Louis de l'Aubonne at present. It was not to be doubted that he would avail himself of such an opening to follow up the drama which, with M. Gueret for its *Deus ex machinâ*, had come to so abrupt a conclusion, by a sequel of storm and passion and prayers, to end who could tell how?

Possessed with that odd fancy, which yet she knew to be no more than a fancy, that while she retained the ring it was a kind of bond between her and the man who had placed it on her hand in so solemn a moment, there had been intervals in which she conceived it her duty to destroy it. But then again she reflected that the sacred manner of her vow, made before God, left it higher than a merely formal law of man, to be fulfilled in spirit at least

even towards him who had avowed it not binding indeed, and to set her life apart like a true wifehood : and then she did not even dare to move the sign of the strange wedding from her finger. So for the three days in which she had been again in the old home which she and her mother had been so thankful to find still able to receive them, she had continued to wear it, doubting. But now she must resolve whether she would still do so, for to-morrow she was to resume her place as Pierre Baudoyer's pupil, and to appear among her classmates with that tell-tale badge was to be prepared to explain to them her painful position and, throwing utterly aside the comfortable veil of secrecy, expose herself to the misconstructions possibly and gossippings certainly of her world. For every reason, above all for that chief reason that it would be to betray Louis to bitter tongues armed with inconsiderate censure and alas ! also with unanswerable condemnation, this was to be avoided ; and happily it could be avoided easily ;—but for that perplexed notion of hers.

She could not think : her mind wandered, some-

times back to the Past that seemed already so far away behind the glooming mists, sometimes on to the vague unreal Future: now memories, now fantastic pictures of scenes in which imaginary consequences of her deciding in either manner were developed with all the minuteness in impossibility of a waking dream and with no preciser adjustment of cause to effect, took the place of thought. I think that with most persons—with many men, and still more naturally with women, whose reason, though quick enough, surely, if that were all, is left without that method which is developed in the mental training of every boy who masters his work up to the fifth form of his school, say that he gets no farther—this kind of discursive meditation often does duty, in ordinary circumstances, for thought, especially if it be on serious subjects: when the rare occasions come requiring prompt yet momentous decision to the wandering bodiless syllogisms, insisting practically against all ambiguous muddles, and confounding of universals and generals, and circle reasonings, commanding definite predicates and absolute conclusions, and denounc-

ing all the fond fallacies and elusions of may be's and might be's coaxed to the taste, in favour of simple statements and close argument, what we all innocently call our *thinking* comes to a shrewd test. It may be that some of us when thus brought to close quarters with our own mind find ourselves not so evidently its master as we had conceived, and prove not such very steady reasoners under the trying circumstances. Happily even in the most peremptory existences they do not occur every day.

Lesley was under such a necessity and did not get on well with it at all. Certainly she had placed herself in the position by her caprice, or sentiment, or superstition, call it which you will; there need have been no difficulty whatever; but Lesley Hawthorn was Lesley Hawthorn, and there was a difficulty. And now that it faced her she could not think.

That question which she had asked herself already more than once: that question which, with no greater cause, many a sorrow-shaken soul has asked, while yet unaccustomed to its new condition, and shud-

dered at its own asking, she asked again in a fresh bewilderment, "Is my reason leaving me?" She gave her memory hard tasks, she repeated old child-learned lessons, "Maître Corbeau sur un arbre perché," the chronology of the French kings from Pharamond to Charles VI, the names of the departments and rivers—"I can remember at all events," she decided. Ah, poor child, she could remember only too well. Had the dull river Lethe only made one in her list, that she might have gone to its smooth waters and drank and slept a little while and wakened happy again! For though we, watching another's sorrow, foresee already a day when those sharp agonies will have ceased, just as we feel assured that the spasms which writhe the body of our invalid will by-and-by have passed away, pain is a keen thing to the sufferer and not to be ignored in any looking forward to far away rest. Time is a good surgeon, but a deliberate one, and where, as happens oftenest in the cases entrusted to him, there has to be some use of the knife, it would be pleasanter not to have to feel the operation. And if you say that

this trouble of Lesley's, being but a girl's love trouble after all, was no very serious thing, why, no more is toothache, which yet, I am told, is while it lasts one of the most acute pains to be suffered. Yet though the only absolute cure is to have the tooth taken away people do not enjoy the salutary torturing process. I, happily for me, have never had toothache; but since, in body as in mind, no sensation possible to our nature (once suggested) can seem wholly unknown to it even though never yet experienced and never to be experienced, I have a tolerably vivid conception of the thing; and I know that if that misfortune should overtake me, followed by its objectionable remedy, I should begin to think about chloroform. And I trust that I may use this precaution as my wisdom through life.


Lesley thought it the best way. She was well aware that, at the very best, she doing her part as one who meant "Thy will be done" in brave Christian truth and not as one might say it to one's tyrant, a long cruel cure awaited her—at the very best, but if she failed to herself then the last

sorrow-sin, scorpion like deepening (as they used to tell the story) and poisoning its own wounds, poor pitiful despair. And she knew that a consciousness intent upon pain, even intent to endure it, becomes a keener superadded sense to endure it, that bearing it thus she *must* faint under it. She had no thought of doing that, she only looked for chloroform: and she perceived that in work, strong purposeful work, lay her opiate. She perceived this as many a woman may have perceived it before now, and not known where to lay her hand on it: unvowed Sisters of Charity have been made thus, and busy-lived Marthas—some have found space for their effort in the great world, some by the home-hearth: but many have looked and not seen their place, and so closed their eyes again disheartened, and fallen back asleep in that sad inner selfishness of vague aspirations and vague regrets, fallen back to a dream-vexed sleep, murmuring “there is nothing to live for.”

Nothing to live for! Oh, maddest and cruellest of all heart deceits. So long as the sun has something to shine for, so long has every man

and woman and child in the world something to live for.

But Lesley found no such difficulty, her work lay ready to her hand. Her art was already for her a profession, but now it must be more—it must be a consecration—not to be pursued as a means only of supporting herself and adding some comforts to her mother's much tried life, but with all her energies and desires bent towards it, that she might be worthy of the priesthood which she now first understood in it. She would study, she would think, she would pray, she would strive all to be greater, so she should *do* more greatly. Not that she was aware of any especial power, though she knew she had talent (inherited from her father, who, so far as he was anything but an idler, was an artist) and patience and love in the labour; but she felt the inspiration that lies in sorrow. Talent and patience and love, these three, if they do not constitute genius, go already so far towards it that it may well be that such an awakening of the soul and clothing it with the great strength of sadness were to such a one the divine impulse vivifying



the secret germ. So very likely this girl's instinct was a true one and a new something, a faculty? a sense? a life? was being evoked in her.

Some such notion might flit mistily through her brain and even already rehearten her, unrecognised, as she sat there trying to think, and still trying in vain. It was of no use to try; when she had tested her memory with the fable and the kings and the departments, and proved her reasoning powers intact by calculations connected with the relative values of French and English coins, as measuring the expenditure in her last month, the time it would take her at her probable average of gain to make up the deficiency it would leave in her mother's scant income, and how much they would have to repay M. Gueret, she had fairly wearied out her little remaining energy and the effort was more futile than before.

She gave it up and prepared for rest. Then she took her little English bible in her hand and sat down again to read. And when she had pored over it long and intently, for it seemed to her a new book full of interest deeper than ever before—

a book that sorrowed and endured and hoped and was comforted as her very inmost self—she put it aside, and quietly, without pausing to consider or to prepare, drew the ring from her finger, and fastened it beside the little cross on a slender gold chain which, almost her only ornament till she knew Louis and now to be quite her only ornament, (for his gifts she had left behind for him, and she meant to sell her other little trinkets at the present pinch to the poor purse) she usually wore round her throat. The cross and the ring would hang inside the dress now, concealed as need was: and I think that it was not without a meaning she placed them together, though she had not paused to weigh it. She clasped the thread-like circlet round her pretty neck, and there the two hung together—not to be removed, she thought, in life, perhaps to lie so in the grave with her.

Then, with that sense of relief which attends *any* resolution after a period of uncertainty, she knelt down and folding her hands prayed simply for peaceful rest and peaceful waking—no more than that, for she dared not yet think

of *him* in prayer. And, with a calm feeling that she had renounced him for ever, she lay down and enjoyed the blessing of exhaustion, deep unbroken sleep.

And all the while Louis de l'Aubonne was raving her name in the delirium of fever.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRESH START.

THE bouquet Pierre Baudoyer had chosen so carefully and arranged with his own hands in its large white vase on the mantleshef in honour of his best pupil's wedding, had scarcely lost its freshness, and here she was again on her way to his studio, very near already, this spring morning, and the good painter couple were awaiting her, whispering together uneasily.

They knew all about it and were prepared to receive her with matter-of-course welcome if she should make her first appearance while the other pupils were there; for they, at all events, had decided unhesitatingly that it would be best to keep strict secrecy on the late events, and they were resolved to carry out to the full the take-things-as-

they-come policy suggested by Simon Gueret. It was from this decorous person, be it said, that they had received their information. For, when Mrs Hawthorn and her daughter had made ready to take flight on that sudden discovery, a great perplexity occurred to them: all Louis's former gifts were made up into a packet by Lesley's own hands and given into Gueret's charge to be delivered to him; the maid he had desired them to engage for his bride was dismissed, and the wages which would have been due to her in a few weeks paid by Mrs Hawthorn, though that not very tremendous outlay left her purse barely full enough to pay their journey back to Paris; but still they were under pecuniary obligation to him, a thing not to be borne, surely, under the present circumstances. They felt sick at heart at the thought of leaving in his debt, nor could they tell how to make arrangements for eventually freeing themselves from the hateful weight, since they could not ask for an account of their share of the expenditure at the hotel without being prepared to pay it; nor could they claim from Louis de

l'Aubonne, even had they thought it likely that he would submit to the indignity, the particulars of that and other outlay for which they would now choose to consider themselves responsible, since it was not for them to propose opening further communication with him on any pretext. And besides, their hope was to get off with so little delay that they should be out of his reach before he was aware of their design, for such an interview as a farewell one with him must be was a thing to shrink from; they knew how madly he would oppose the inexorable necessity, how he would plead and reproach and suffer and make Lesley suffer threefold for him. No wonder they were making haste to escape him.

But what was to be done? And again what was to be done? And never a whit could they answer, but they looked at each other troublously and felt that it was hard indeed to accept this position; it was terrible to these two women to have to carry one sou's burden of gift from Louis de l'Aubonne.

Probably good Simon Gueret guessed the diffi-

culty; at all events he so fitted his conversation towards it that it was all but unavoidable that they should do the only thing which could tend to annul it, and own the state of the case to him.

“Allow me to arrange that,” he said, so promptly, for him, that it looked as if he had lain in wait for the communication with his answer prepared; but, indeed, when M. Gueret once got under way to speak it always seemed as if the speech had been prepared. “Allow me to arrange it. Of course, Mademoiselle, and also Madame, cannot remain, as they say, under obligation to this person. I conceive their scruples of delicacy, and although they are doubtless unnecessary on their part, considering the manner in which they have been deceived, I would not have them set aside. Mesdames will honour me, then, by suffering me, immediately after their departure, to make the requisite enquiries and, with all decision, to repay in their name to M. de l’Aubonne all which shall appear to have been expended by him on their account. I will then communicate with them at the address which they will have the goodness to name.”

The mother and daughter looked at each other; Mrs Hawthorn, in a confused manner, murmured something which seemed a declining of the offer, in which the hurried words "strangers" and "obligation," sounded like the key-notes.

Gueret understood it perfectly. "I am aware, Mesdames," he explained, "that as a stranger I must not take the liberty of conferring a favour on you; but it is my right and my duty to perform a casual service to you as ladies whom I find in an accidental embarrassment, and all the laws of courtesy permit it to me. For the rest I pledge myself that I will account to you to the uttermost for my outlay in your names, and accept my position as your creditor without objection, only praying you to let me wait your perfect convenience."

Mrs Hawthorn looked at the stiff unmoved countenance turned towards her, and wondered if the man could really know what a kindness he was offering, or did indeed think it a mere matter of courtesy. What to answer she knew not, for the accepting it from a wholly unknown person was a

matter of doubtful expediency and one that would gall her pride, and to decline it seemed to her then to be almost to leave her daughter in the power of Louis de l'Aubonne. She opened her lips to speak and got no farther: then she coughed and looked at Lesley.

Lesley understood the appeal; from her childhood she had been accustomed to assist her mother, or rather to act for her, in all emergencies calling for decision. She thought that this question must be entered on openly and resolutely, even if she must throw aside for the moment her habitual lady's reticence on pecuniary questions, and she came forward bravely to face the ordeal. And she too looked at Gueret, wondering how his formal air and precise discourse could be reconciled with such real kindness of heart and such unguarded confidence in two mere strangers, but she saw no cause for mistrust in his look, but rather was assured of an honesty and, contradictory as it might seem, a genuine simplicity in his real nature under all that studied preciseness. So she asked him simply, looking into his face with her

truthful eyes, "Why are you willing to do this for us?"

"Because you have no honest friend here. And because you, my child, have the face of a pure angel and are so young and so unhappy." Thus spoke Simon Gueret, answering the look and the tone that seemed to rely so innocently on his veracity. "It is, after all, so small a service; it is I who will be benefited by the honour mesdames will do me in accepting it," he added in his habitual manner, answering the words.

"But," said Lesley, "let us speak of it frankly, it is a great kindness you wish to do us: it may be a considerable sum you would have to advance for us; we are unknown to you, we tell you that we are poor, why would you trust us?"

Gueret smiled. "You feel in your own guilelessness so many reasons why even a stranger should trust you that I need not give you any; yet, think, why should I suppose that you, who are so honourably desirous to discharge a debt for which no one holds you responsible, would

for that purpose commit a miserable baseness? What gain could I conceive it to you?"

"And if there *were* gain—" the girl began a little haughtily. "Oh, no," she said, checking herself, "I am foolish. You judge rightly; moreover, were we capable of such an infamy, what could it serve us? But how should we make proper return to you for the inconvenience? Might we make some arrangement of a just acknowledgment to be paid for the loan, above the sum itself, when we repaid it?"

"All that is usual in such transactions shall be done, if mademoiselle insists when the time arrives," said Gueret, with threefold rigidity. "The receipted accounts of that which I shall have paid being placed in her hands, we will then proceed to an exact settlement. If mademoiselle resolves on my following the customs of a moneylender lest I should have the pleasure of flattering myself that I had been serviceable to her, it is for me to comply."

Lesley's answer was to put her hand into his and say, "See, the bargain is made. Do not be

angry with me, I know you are kind, and I seem ungracious ; but what can I do ?”

There was a sadness in that “what can I do ?” that moved even M. Gueret from his staid demeanour, reminding him of her desolate position, and he turned away abruptly as he pressed her hand with almost an English grasp, and answered only, “We are agreed then.”

“Are we not, mama ?” she asked. And Mrs Hawthorn, finding the question settled, gave her consent and was free to complain about it ever after, since she had been but a passive listener to its discussion.

So M. Gueret was left to transact this piece of business for them, and they had even accepted, when they departed in haste half an hour later, a small loan, not unneeded to make their minds easy as to the accomplishment of their journey. But Lesley, unreasonable as it was, had a little feeling of indignation—no not indignation, say soreness, on her mind that M. Gueret had had a *reason* to give for trusting them, and she could not wholly overcome it, even in perceiving his

perfect security in their good faith. Therefore she would not be denied leaving some pledge in his hands ; Gueret's politeness forbade him to dispute the point when he saw how much in earnest she was.

"See," she said, "we have few things of price, but my bracelet, if of no great value, shows by the portrait it contains that we prize it too much to leave it unredeemed. It is my mother's eldest brother, done in his youth and hers while they were each other's favourite companions ; and now they would pass as strangers."

"I will preserve it for you if you command it," replied Gueret, "only I had not intended to intrude a personal visit, possibly unwelcome, on Mesdames, happy as I should have been to see them again had they expressed a wish for it ; but I cannot trust this, like a letter, to a poste restante address, and I am compelled to ask for an opportunity of placing it again in their hands."

"I fear we shall hardly find our old apartment vacant," said Mrs Hawthorn, "it is for that reason that I could give you no address."

"Yet," interrupted Lesley, "we have an address to give after all, for I, at least, shall be found in the studio of M. Baudoyer, and,"—

"Pierre Baudoyer?" enquired Gueret, "painter, a Gascon, with a handsome wife with quick black eyes and brown hair?"

"Yes," said Lesley eagerly. "Do you know him?"

"Let us ascertain. He has lived now some years in Paris, say ten?"

"Eleven," said she. "I have heard him say so. I have known him six."

"And his wife also paints, but not so well? And he does not love to spend much, yet loves well enough to give? And he is a short rotund man, with a face like a triangle nevertheless, and he has peering grey eyes and tangled black hair?"

"Grey hair," put in Lesley, "thick and tangled, but quite grey."

"Ah!" sighed Gueret, "eleven years!" and for a moment he ceased to look like a wooden lay-block; "and you have never heard him speak of

me?" he resumed, "of his old schoolfellow, Simon Gueret?"

"No. Yet often he has talked of his youth, and loves to relate his schoolboy frolics."

"Did he tell you of coming in the priest's soutane and giving the Friday lecture to the second class, pretending Father Joseph was ill and had sent him to take his place, and puzzling all the masters with his new doctrines?"

"Yes. But it was not he who did it, it was Colin, Colin le Malin, as he calls him."

"C'est ça, c'est ça," said Gueret, almost eagerly, "I thought he would not have completely forgotten me—Colin they called me in those fine days, by a school joke which it is needless to relate—Colin, and they would add le Malin for I was of all that youth the most frolicsome."

"M. Baudoyer is your friend then?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle—or was; for who knows what time may have effaced of a sentiment."

"But, if you are Colin, it seems to have effaced nothing."

"That is good to hear, Mademoiselle. We have

lost sight of each other long; at first when he went to Paris we, from time to time, exchanged letters, but that ceased. He wrote to me while I was absent on a journey, and I did not receive the letter in time to reach him with my answer before the accomplishment of a change of residence which he had announced to me without giving me the particulars; thus I did not know his address, and he, who possessed a certain touchy humility, doubtless concluded, as he had before been prompt to imagine when he fancied neglect, that I remembered too evidently that my social position was more advantageous than his, and wrote to me no more. I thank you, Mademoiselle, that by your means I shall be enabled to resume our interrupted intercourse."

"Then," said Lesley, "I will ask a kindness of you. Will you write to him and tell him the circumstances under which I return his pupil as before, and bid him show no surprise at seeing me again so soon—as soon as I dare trust myself—in his studio? I could not explain yet—you would save me so much pain."

Gueret was pleased at the suggestion ; pleased that she asked him to do her a kindness not to be bargained over, and pleased at so good an opportunity for breaking the ice of all those years between him and his old friend. He bowed his lowest over it, and the address was given him, distinctly written in spite of the poor trembling little hand, just as Mrs Hawthorn appeared, finally ready to start.

Mrs Hawthorn and Lesley refused his proffered escort to the steamboat, and he was too courteous to insist; the more that he perceived that his accompanying them might add fresh subject for speculation on the sudden change in their plans, which was already amazing the staff of the hotel and which would soon form a topic for comments and conjectures innumerable among its occupants, who had, for the most part, shown a good deal of curiosity about this fair girlish bride. So he lost no time in fulfilling his commission as to the letter, and thus the Baudoyers, while from wise kindness they had refrained from seeking out their sorrow-

stricken pupil, were looking anxiously for her appearance.

Yet they hardly counted on her coming so soon; but they said, "This must be the fourth day, and she should not delay long, for the shorter her absence the shorter the wonder," and they fidgeted about in an unsettled manner very unlike their usual art-engrossed quietude at that morning time. They sat by the window watching for her, although they knew that in that short bowbacked street there was every chance of their not catching sight of her as she came along.

"If she comes, it will surely be a little before the hour," said Madame, "that she may not meet us first in the presence of all those young ladies."

"And already there are scarcely a few minutes to spare," returned her husband anxiously. "No, she will not come to-day."

But just at that moment a light step was heard on the stairs. The old painter's eye fell upon the brilliant bouquet, as he turned from the window. "Ah that bouquet! We have forgotten, she will think why it was placed there."

Mde. Baudoyer, red with alarm, rushed at it and, snatching it from its vase, hid it beneath her shawl. "There is not time, she is coming," she ejaculated breathlessly. "What can one do with it?"

"Throw it from the window, my friend," said her husband. And the flowers were tossed out and fell with a plash on the stones, where the porter's children seized on them triumphantly; and Lesley, coming on them presently in their division of the spoils, understood the little history at a glance and a word, and trembled a little the more as she began to ascend the staircase.

For it had not been Lesley the Baudoyers had heard, but only Elise coming full of eagerness to begin a new and more difficult study of colour. And all the pupils had come and were arranging themselves to their work when Lesley came in among them.

She had chosen her time carefully, and had succeeded in her plan. She meant to come after the others, that there might be no, what you might call, first meeting with her friendly teachers, for she

dreaded losing her composure in painful explanations, and not being able to sustain her part afterwards: and she meant to come while the business of the day was being set on foot, that her companions, pre-occupied with that, might observe her the less.

She was received without surprise; the companions had only been told that she had gone for a little while to England with her mother, and, seeing nothing singular in her visit to the country from which she derived her origin, saw nothing singular in her return. And Mde. Baudoyer had tact enough to divert her own emotion and the attention of her pupils into another channel by a vigorous fit of criticism; and Madame's criticism was not to be heard carelessly; she was a hot little vessel and there was no telling which way the steam might scald when she fizzed and bubbled. It was a little hard on Mlle. Euphrasie, whose drawing was no more sinful against the laws of perspective than usual, but no doubt it was necessary that she should have her shortcomings impressed on her from time to time, and the lecture

on them was instructive to her fellow-students. At all events it enabled Lesley to pass on undelayed by conversation or separate greetings.

There was no change visible in her yet. Her walk had revived her fresh transparent complexion, and brightness of cheek easily represents brightness of expression to unsuspicious beholders. If you had been there and had had time to notice closely you *might* have recognized a weary look in the eyes, that, detected among the blushes and smiles of youth, has its own sad significance; but happily you do not often observe so minutely (if you did too many sacred mysteries would become public and unmysterious, and the great whirring machine Society would become a torture, "a question" to reluctant confessors), and you would quite likely have dreamed of no shadow beneath the girlish bloom and rounding of the face. And she had a self-possession that baffled mere casual scrutiny.

So this ordeal was over, and she had passed through it safely. She was very thankful at heart for that; for, the first embarrassment over, she

knew she could fall naturally into her old place, and have no over-curious attention called on her.

There was one effort more to make. Without hesitating she opened the inner door of the little room in which she had worked alone since Pierre Baudoyer, thinking her more than a mere young lady artist, had condescended to remove her from his wife's class to be his own immediate pupil. The door opened into his own studio, where he was intently engaged on his *chef d'œuvre* that was to be, the martyrdom of St Someone who is lying (the picture is finished now and is highly esteemed) bound with cords, every sinew in a horrible tension and the veins swelled into blue cords, while fiendish-looking executioners are torturing her, chiefly by tearing her flesh with red hot pincers, her face, expressing only a meek beatitude, upturned to visionary angels floating above her—one of those scenes of ghastly detail dear to French art.

"I do but look in to wish you good-day, and let you see me returned, dear M. Baudoyer," she said, lightly, "and I make haste to set to work."

The painter started at her voice, but he discerned her wish and did but return her greeting with a brief instruction as to her sketch, and was absorbed again in his picture. Nor did he and his wife afterwards make the slightest attempt to draw her into conversation on a subject which they saw she wished to have ignored. It was outwardly as if there had been no break in her life ; she seemed to continue naturally from where she had paused, and day after day passed quietly by finding her with the same occupations and even the same pleasures as of old.

But she was suddenly, greatly changed. She felt it sadly. "The sorrow I can bear," she thought ; "but this weary *old* feeling is a harder thing. I am a woman too soon." She was conscious of a new mental development, of greater powers and wider, deeper sympathies, but she seemed to pay too dear a price for them in parting with her youth. She herself was the first to perceive that the kitten-like playfulness, the pretty *mutineries* and caprices which so lightly and gracefully veiled her real thoughtfulness were gone, and she re-

gretted, as she might have regretted the brown hairs when the grizzled had come—they were a part of her youth.

Ah, I am sure that the looking-glass could still tell a different story from that of any one else who watched her, and that the nights knew sad secrets she never owned to the days. For slowly and slowly, almost imperceptibly, the shadow grew upon her; and how should that be if she had forgotten?

Nevertheless she had her happiness; she began to feel the inspiration of her art; her life went out into it more and more; and though it might be doubted whether this growing gift of genius were not in itself a sadness, yet it was sorrow's greatest rival.

And so let us leave her to her weakness and her strength, learning their secret oneness, as many a troubled God's child in this sleepless world has done before her.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW LOUIS KEPT HIS WEDDING-DAY.

PAUL de l'Aubonne had a hard task after he had withdrawn his brother from that farewell with Lesley. His devotion, sincere though it was, did not, as he admitted mournfully, console Louis for her selfish rigour and for the arid heart he had lost. Louis raved and wept, and then would pause suddenly in the midst of his passion, as if struck with a sudden stupor, and so remain, heavy and still, until some sound, or some thought of his own aroused him to the knowledge that she was about to depart for ever out of his sight, and then the paroxysm came on again. Unfortunately the room Paul had engaged for himself, into which he had conducted his brother, had been purposely chosen near those occupied by the Hawthorns, so that by-

and-by the sound of hurried rustlings to and fro and opening and shutting of wardrobes and boxes, could be heard there—an evident warning that their neighbours had no thought of relenting or delay.

“Yes, they are going!” cried Louis, starting to his feet, “They are going! selfish pride of women! What does my agony matter to them?” “Nothing,” answered Paul vehemently. “Nothing, I tell thee. That girl, white and cold as a figure of snow, has no heart, no love. She is safe, she asks no more—if she should weep it will be that the game she played for a great marriage is lost.”

“No, she has loved me, my white dove, she has loved me,” sobbed Louis.

“Then how has she changed so promptly, my poor friend? Thou weepest for her—she saw thee weep—and she is going.”

“She is going?—but going! But I will follow her, oh yes, I follow. Come, we must prepare for the journey.”

This was just what Paul had expected and feared. He did not wish his brother to meet his

fugitive lady again, for he believed in his heart that she was an aspiring adventuress who would do her best to drive him to the desperation of renouncing home and family and golden future to make her his own, and, though he also believed in his heart (which had had its own experience, for Paul was a Frenchman and in his twenty-third year) that after this first exquisite anguish of parting, too mad to last and already more than an hour old, was over, the dangerous crisis would be past and the convalescent stage fairly entered upon, he felt sure that Louis would be capable of any degree of madness if he fell again under the spells of the siren while the fever-fit was yet on him.

It was of no use to try to make the unfortunate young man perceive the serpent coils that revealed the true nature of the siren he called his white dove: she had lured him to her across an enchanted sea of love, and now, gasping for breath, with the salt waters between his lips, he still saw only her fair face and warm woman hands beckoning him on into the deadly surges. "I speak in vain now," said Paul inwardly, "that which soon he will speak

to himself. At present there is to remove him from this dangerous vicinity : this day once well over all will go well, for this girl will be gone."

He assumed that authority which the hale take naturally over the sick, a goodnatured domineering which it were ingratitude to resist, and insisted on having Louis out with him. "Thou shalt guide me through this colossal town, which thou knowest a little and I nothing. We will go to this Park in which the beauty and the rank and the wealth of these insulaires displays itself, and we will find a distraction from these vexations."

In vain Louis objected; Paul, in right of his mental calmness, had seized the dictatorship; there was no escape. "Come then, Louis," he said with well acted impatience, "here is thy hat,—come then. We will fly from this vicinity which unmans thee, we will find at least a momentary oblivion in new scenes.

"Well then," said Louis quickly, "come; in new scenes one may lose a moment the desolating power of thinking." And he dashed out of the room, leaving his astonished brother to follow, and

hurrying with averted head past the room where, as the fluttered lady's maid passed in, Paul saw the white dress of the siren, as she stood bending over the table, sealing a little packet (a packet in which were Louis's love gifts), and was in the open air before Paul could rejoin him.

So Paul had his way, and the bride and bridegroom of that morning, strangers henceforward, were altogether parted. For, if they had not said it, both brothers understood that they were not to return till late at night, when *she* would be gone. Louis said, "I will not return again to this house," but Paul answered, "We must return—that Gueret will doubtless remain to speak with us. We cannot forget the godfather, dost thou see?" He was not afraid, however, of M. de Fourrière's supposed agent; Louis, having renounced his marriage, was safe in that quarter.

Paul, having no tourist zeal for lionizing and having a disparaging opinion of the beauties of London streets, had said, "We will go to the park," thinking that the life and gaiety of a fashionable promenade was the most likely thing

to divert his brother's attention from his disappointment; but the plan was a failure; the younger brother criticised and commented with all his wonted volubility, but the elder brother answered irrelevantly, breaking into lament and anger without explanation, just as if they had all along only been speaking of one subject, *his* one subject. They were strangers in that gay company; grey horses and blue liveries and bay horses and green liveries seen advancing in a halo of dust forewarned them of no looked for acquaintances at hand; the pretty faces had no smiles for them and the lounging men with whiskers had not to take the trouble of fixing their eyes to recognize them and nod familiarly; nobody had greetings to exchange with them, nobody seemed to know that they were there. It was very *triste* and lonely, Paul thought, among all these people; they were as much tête-à-tête as if they had remained in their room; and Louis talked on feverishly on his subject.

Paul flagged with walking at last, but Louis seemed bent on tiring himself out, and the good-

natured fellow thought "it is good for him, and fatigue will not kill me," and allowed himself to be made a victim to his brother's unusual fancy for physical exertion. When they left the park they walked in the streets still: Paul said, "But, mon cher, we must dine," but in vain; Louis asked him fiercely, "Thou wouldst dine if I were dead an hour ago, doubtless?" And they continued their peregrination. But at length nature insisted on her rightful sustenance; Paul said, "But, mon cher, *absolutely* we must dine." And Louis, in a faint voice, his face very white by this time, consented.

"But where shall we dine to-day?" asked Paul. That pathetic question is answered daily in the advertisement column of more than one paper. I forget the establishment so obligingly suggested; Paul as a Frenchman naturally thought of Verey's, and thither they went and dined after their own Parisian fashion.

In the warm room, amid the fumes of a meal set before him when his exhaustion was too great for food to do its wholesome service, Louis's

pallor flushed into a bursting crimson, and when, as he drank of the Englishman's stronger wines, which he had called for, as if needing a stimulus, instead of any of the lighter vintages he was accustomed to use, his eyes began to glitter fiercely—with a glare rather than a light—and he talked more feverishly than ever, Paul began to be uneasy lest he should fall into an excess or lest this over excitement might be dangerously increased.

"Come, we will go to the theatre," he said, rising to forestal any objection by assuming Louis's consent. Louis was willing. "Yes, let us go—she shall hear that I could amuse myself on the very day of her deserting me—that cursed Gueret shall tell her of it."

His tones were so wild that Paul would have taken him home at once; but that there was a risk of the women they were avoiding being only then about to set out (as was the fact indeed), and they might even meet them face to face. There was nothing for it but the theatre.

It does not much matter which they chose, as

neither of them understood more than three words of what they heard there. Nor does it matter what was the name of the piece nor who was the fascinating actress who played its heroine, the brothers themselves never having been cognizant of either particular. But in the piece it so happened that there was a tremendous quarrel and parting between the lovers, and the fascinating actress, in a white dress and with gold-brown hair something the tint of Lesley Hawthorn's, turned angrily, dashing the tears from her eyes unseen by any one, excepting the audience, away from the despairing young gentleman kneeling at her feet. And it so happened that among the audience, sitting close to the de l'Aubonnes, were four squat youths luxurious in pomatum and sham jewelry, who might have been shopmen, but if they were would be very much mortified at being thought so, while if they were not, some respectable shopman might feel as much mortified at the mistake which had classed them with him. They dropped the H's and were facetious: and as they had all of them passed two

or three degrees beyond sobriety, and one of them conspicuously, their facetiousness was extra offensive.

Louis, who had relapsed into a weary quietude, fixed all his attention on the stage-lovers, and the squat youths fixed all theirs on him. Paul perceived that they were practising their wit at his brother's expense, and, in a less degree, at his own—a fact which they took care should be no secret; but his scanty comprehension of their language, of which they somehow became aware, left him at their mercy. He cast withering glances at them, but these, met by new grimaces, only added to their flow of wit.

Louis perceived nothing of all this. In fact, he was losing himself away from his surroundings: his head felt heavy, all seemed in a mist in his sight and in his thoughts, excepting those figures mimicking his story on the stage; he was losing consciousness of what they were, it felt as if he were dreaming them; but he still understood what they meant—they touched an instinct of trouble in him. When you are asleep you do not question

about the scenes that pass before you in the dream-world, and you are alone, however many of those varying forms of its people you see about you vaguely, because you have a feeling that among them all you are the only reality; they do not disturb you from your own dream emotions. Louis seemed asleep thus. Conscious only of himself, and that passively, he made no resistance to the troublous sensations which dimly oppressed him.

At length he leaned his forehead on one hand, and great tears began to swell on his long eyelashes. This was too good an opportunity for humour for his persecutors to lose.

"I say, look 'ere, this is interestin, Frenchy's took melancholy," jeered the nearest, in a boisterous whisper.

"Too much for his feelins, eh?" said the farthest, putting his tongue in his cheek.

"P'raps ain't used to this kind of thing, and thinks it all boney fider," said another.

"Yes, per'aps the party is not in the 'abit' of witnessing thehatrical representations, and finds

'is feelings excited by the brilliancy and faithfulness of the depiction," was the emendation of the fine gentleman of the quartet, who even in his lighter moments disdained to lower his language to the unadorned license of every-day conversation.

"I'd offer him my cambric, Jim; as 'e's a Frenchman 'e mayn't appen to 'ave a clean one about him."

"No, no, you won't get it back," and "Do, he might take it kind," said two of the others in a breath, while the more deliberate Jim was beginning, "I should be 'appy to offer a similar attention to the other party, who appears to be in some agitation; it might be considered a kyindness to enable 'im to remove that unpleasant dampness from his halabaster brow."

"Take care, he looks as if he was up to us; he understood you, Jim."

"Not 'e, but he exhibits indication of a wish to."

"Tell 'im listenin's not bong tong. Ere, Oskins, offer the other gent this," said Jim's neighbour, drawing forth his highly-scented pocket handkerchief, and pointing to Louis.

Hoskins thrust it, as if by accident however, not to go too far, close to Louis's face, but Louis merely drew back, unaware of the incivility. Encouraged by impunity the quartett became still wittier.

"It's a shame though really to let the poor feller think it's all real that 'e sees up there. Jim, you can parley-voo a bit, according to your own account, you tell him not to fret over it too much, it aint true." And, charmed at the humour of the suggestion, they all applauded.

Jim hesitated, but the game seemed quite safe, as the foreigners, remarked his companions, couldn't get up a row about a bit of politeness to them, and then the temptation of showing his companions that he really could speak French went for something. So he lent forward over his grinning neighbour to Louis and began: "*Ne soyey pas concernay Mosseu, cella nest pas real que veu voyey lay actours jouey, et il ne pay pas a criei pour riong.*" By which he meant: "Don't be concerned, what you see the actors play isn't real, and it doesn't pay to cry for nothing,"—his

refinement failing him in the excitement of translating what he wished to say into French.

Louis looked vacantly at him, "Pardon, Monsieur?" but Paul turned round angrily, "What do you want of us?"

The delinquent, nothing abashed, replied jauntily, "Je n'ay pas parley à veu," and repeated to Louis his assurance: "cella n'est pas real doo tout, aussi soor comme mon nom est Jim Parsons."

"Well, Jim," said Paul de l'Aubonne in a condescending tone and using the French second person singular, as to an inferior: "We do not need thy services, and we could not at any rate engage thee without a recommendation, so do not give thyself the trouble of saying more, my man."

The youth turned very red in the face, and muttered something about an "infernal French jackanapes," but had no answer forthcoming.

"What did he say?—'E's got the best of it asn't 'e?—eh—eh—what was it?" his companions kept repeating, and "nothing, nothing—only asked

what I wanted," kept answering the disconcerted Jim Parsons, but he could not prevent them from having an inkling of Paul's contemptuous meaning, and under that mortification his vein of pleasantry dried up. In sheer ill temper he tried to avenge himself by annoying the two foreigners with perpetual pushings and sprawlings of legs and arms, in which his friends, on the consideration that the snubbing administered to him had a recoil on them, helped him with a will, so that Paul began to foresee with horror a vulgar brawl forced on him and his brother in a public place. He wished to go, but Louis, not understanding the position, showed unwillingness to be disturbed and answered absently, without moving. At length, just when, in despair, Paul was calculating the possibility of drawing him away suddenly without consulting him, the piece came to an end and the scramble of departure began. "Ah! what a happiness," he sighed from his heart, and the troubles of the day seemed over: it was only to get back to their hotel now, those women would be gone and Louis's exhaustion would

prevent him from feeling any violent distress at it and would incline him to the night's good sleep that would do so much for him.

They lost their enemies in the crowd, and without farther annoyance worked their way into the street. "A la bonne heure—now to call a cab." But Louis, revived by the air, prayed to be allowed to walk: "I must weary myself, that I may rest at length," he urged piteously; "drive thou, if thou wilt, I shall rejoin thee safely."

Paul, of course, had no idea of leaving him, and they walked on together. "When we have come a little out of the crowd we will seek directions for our way back," he said, but he thought, "A few steps and he will be so tired he will consent not to walk."

So it would have been, and no harm done, but unfortunately there came behind them presently a clatter of vulgar voices and the offensive quartett pushed rudely against them.

"Ullo!" cried one, as the brothers looked round, "'Ere's the interestin foreigners again."

"'Tis sweet to meet the lost again and grasp

them by the 'and," quoted Hoskins from his favourite song.

"Beastly idiot!" muttered Jim Parsons, "I should like to give 'im a good kicking." And, suiting the action as nearly to the word as he dared, he jostled savagely against Paul from behind so as to make him stagger forwards.

"Vouatte is zis, dog?" Paul shouted in exasperation. "I shell straike ieu to earrt if ieu arre insolent."

A roar of laughter answered him. "Ve sall gib zoo a dood lickin if zoo don't look sarp and be off," said the wittiest of the party.

"I'd like to know who you call dog, Mister Frenchy," said the indignant Jim, preparing for war. "Look, do you see that?" and he clenched his fist in Paul's face.

Louis struck at him in a moment. "Diable!" said Paul. "Thou hast awakened famously at length! Behold us in the midst of an English *boxe*."

It was not exactly a "boxe," but Jim made a rush against Louis which pushed him roughly to

the wall ; Paul sprang to the scene with a vigour which made Jim forget his manliness, as he had already forgotten his refinement, and give vent to a howl and a curse of pain : the other three closed round pushing and hitting ; Jim, encouraged, became still more aggressive—a ring began to form round the scuffle, some of the outsiders began to suggest that some one should go for the police, but as none of them thought of performing that good service himself, it fell out that no one went, and the two young Frenchmen found themselves in no very promising situation. They were likely to get a good deal the worst of it ; Louis in his present state was nearly useless—his excitement indeed gave him the hysterical strength of an enraged woman but it could give no more—and Paul, though as dauntless as a lion, had no science, so that numerical strength must carry its full value against him.

But at this juncture open flew the door of a cab waiting in a dead-lock just opposite the scene of combat, and a gentleman jumped out—a stalwart man and one not to be attacked lightly if looks

went for anything. Forcing his way through the throng he was at Paul's side before the assailants had had time to find out that he had thrust them aside in an unexpected and not especially gentle manner.

"Stand back, young men," he said, not very loud, but so authoritatively that his voice startled them all the more for its quiet "Take my advice and go home as fast as you can, before you get into a serious scrape."

However they could not go for the being told; with so many lookers on it would not do to submit to such a humiliation, so they fussed and pushed and muttered, still on the offensive.

"Better go home, I tell you," repeated the newcomer, "you will regret it if your employers come to hear of this, I should say—be off before the police come up or it will be the worse for you. I was at the theatre and I have seen the whole affair, my lads, and it won't be over pleasant for you before the magistrate, if you wait for that."

The spirits of the quartett began to be rather

dashed—the bystanders laughed. Jim Parsons did not choose to be laughed at. “It’s no fault of ours,” he said sulkily, pointing to Louis, “*He* hit at *me*.” “And I shan’t go for your telling me neither,” he added, with reviving courage.

“You struck him first, sir—come be off while you can.”

“It’s a lie; but I’ll strike *you* first though,” said the fellow, raising his hand with an oath.

“Oh, is that it,” said the newcomer quietly; and somehow Jim Parsons found himself sprawling on the ground, astonished.

“Pick up that fool, you there,” said the victor calmly to Jim’s abashed friends, “and get home while you can.”

It seemed better to comply: Jim was picked up and persuaded away, making a show of defiance for the look of the thing but subdued at heart; and the discomfitted quartett slunk away from the jeers of the crowd, which thought it had considered them mean bullies all along;—whereas it had in fact much inspirited them by its sympathy at the onset.

"Can I assist you?" the stranger began, courteously, turning to the brothers, but he interrupted himself, surprised, "Why!—Good heavens, is he so much hurt?"

Louis was sinking to the ground, his face as white as death.

"Not hurt—ill. Mon Dieu! how shall I get him home!" said Paul in despair.

"I am well enough," gasped Louis, "it was but a moment's dizziness." And indeed he looked better already, and was able to get to the cab their new ally offered without support. But they had to lift him in.

"I will go with you, if you will allow me," suggested the stranger, seeing Paul's distress, "you may require help if the shock continues to affect him."

Paul was aware of a shade of contempt in his new friend's manner, as if he despised the weakness that seemed to have had its origin in alarm, so he explained as they drove off that his brother had suffered from great distress of mind all that day—he had received a terrible blow from a person he

trusted; in fact he had been driven almost to desperation, and had become so exhausted that this excitement overcame him.

The stranger seemed puzzled at some of Paul's high-flown sentiments, as he conveyed this statement, but was interested in the young men—than whom he himself was not many years older indeed. He assisted in carrying Louis to his room and getting him to bed, and left with Paul the address of a medical man to whom it would be well to send if increasing illness should overcome Louis's objection to the step, and he spoke of calling betimes next day to see if he could be of any service, or, as he should hope to hear that M. de l'Aubonne was no longer in need of care—a promise which was grateful to the brothers, who, now that trouble had come upon them, felt in need of a friend in the strange land.

CHAPTER IX.

IN SHOAL WATER.

WHEN Simon Gueret went, the morning after Lesley's departure, towards Louis de l'Aubonne's room to fulfil her commission, he was passed on his way along the corridor by the more expected visitor going in the same direction with a prompter step—there was confusion among the domesticity of the hotel, and he had been sent up unushered; Gueret, for his own diplomatic reasons, was intending to announce himself.

The Englishman was impatiently knocking at the door a second time when the Frenchman reached it. "What is going on?" he asked the new-comer, "there seems to be something wrong."

Gueret had no time to express his ignorance, for Paul de l'Aubonne was heard from within.

"Is any one there? Come in, come in, for the love of God."

They hastened to obey the summons. A sitting-room, disordered as if some one had slept in it, was empty: but from the adjacent bedroom came a sound of groanings, and Paul's voice still calling "Come." They found him with Louis's head resting on his shoulder, and Louis's limp hands held in his. Louis was lying on the bed half dressed, in a fainting state.

"Hush!" whispered Paul hoarsely, "he is quiet now, he has worn himself out—but he is mad."

"Just heaven! what a fate!" ejaculated Gueret horrified, "has that poor child been avenged on him thus!"

"Let me take your place a moment," said the Englishman, seeing that Paul's increasing agitation was rendering him incapable of assisting his brother. "There"—he had moved him away without waiting for an answer; "that is better, he does not find out the change, you see—you can chafe his hands."

The poor fellow was thankful to be directed.

"Thank God you are come," he said, "no one would stay with me, they said it was fever and fled from the contagion—and my traitor of a servant refuses to remain a day, an hour—"

His new friend interrupted him without scruple, for he saw that he would break down in continuing: "You have sent for the doctor?"

"Yes, they hastened to propose that; but I would only let them call the one you named—but, my God! of what use is it? He is mad."

"Stand a little more aside, the free air is doing him good" (Gueret had opened the window). "Why do you say he is mad?"

"He has been frenzied for hours—raving—weeping—he struck me, taking me for ——" Paul hesitated, he remembered who was standing silently facing him, ready to be of help: it was Gueret Louis had cursed and fought at, though Paul had been the one to bear it actually.

"That was fever, very likely."

"Then he will die! Oh, my brother!"

"Look, he is better. Hold the glass to his lips—he will understand you better than either of us."

But Paul's hand trembled, so that it must be Gueret to hold the water to Louis's reviving lips. Gueret felt very forgiving in that moment, looking on the death-like face that was so young, and thinking that trouble had brought him to this. When he had stood at the door waiting to enter he had hated him; but then he had pictured to himself that young girl, desolate with her love journeying far away, and here a selfish profligate consoled and indifferent already, or planning new treacheries to ensnare her. And he had found him dying.

Louis began to revive, he opened his eyes and stared vacantly at Gueret—then the look of consciousness began to pass into them.

Gueret moved aside: "Let him recognize you first," he said to Paul, on a hint from the Englishman, a wiser hint than the giver suspected.

"Ah, Paul," murmured the faint voice at last, "then I am not dead. Where is she?"

"She must not come just yet," was answered from behind him, "wait a little."

Louis was quite contented; in his dreamy

languor he never thought of doubting, he formed no idea as to who this unknown person addressing him might be—it was all of course.

“But she is gone,” whispered Paul to the Englishman.

“Is she? Well, he must not be told yet—whichever she may be.” The last clause was a parenthesis to himself, he had no more idea who she might be than the man in the moon. But he had made out from Paul’s pathetic representations last night that some pretty girl had jilted the elder of the two brothers on the wedding-day—apparently on some question of settlements—and that he had been too deeply attached to her to recognize the blessing he had in losing his fair fortune-hunter.

“Another of them!” he had murmured to himself last night, musing in the stillness before he went to sleep. “Good Heavens! why are women, women of pure hearts and lives, taught to look on themselves as auction-lots for the highest bidder? How on earth do they get the coarse idea of the marriage market to chime in with their

feminine delicacy? But I suppose this girl had little of that, by her coming here clandestinely with her lover though. 'Golden-haired rose-cheeked meess.' Well, golden hair and rose cheeks go off well sometimes;—*hers* did. One would have said she was the last girl on earth to do that, but it was too good a chance to throw away for all her vestal dignity. Stuff and nonsense, and ill nature too. How do I know she wasn't in love with him? She never said she was with me at all events—and if she had been, it was very natural she should get over it. I oughtn't to think of her in the same breath with this Frenchman's light-o'-love. Such a child as she was too, what could one expect? How one's old self dies out of one! I can hardly realize the fact now, that it was I who thought my life broken and worthless, because she had gone out of it. This poor fellow, I suppose, feels as if the sun would never shine again. What a perfect face he has! he ought to have been able to get a woman to worship him. But he's well out of it no doubt."

Thus his thoughts had flickered into the darkness of rest perfect in sleep, and in the morning he had forgotten them. But Paul's card on his dressing-table had reminded him of his promise to call on the two young strangers, in whom he had begun last night to feel an interest, and, reflecting on the state in which he had left one of them, he had made up his mind to lose no time in going where he might be of use.

It was fortunate that he was there at that time, for, when presently Louis, with some recovered strength, began to look round him, he caught sight of Gueret, whom he recognized in a moment as M. de Fourrière's agent and the destroyer of his happiness. At once he was raving in the wildest excitement,

"Go from me, demon. I am dying; there is no more need of you. What are you still afraid of? A dead man can have no love, can he? What do you want of me now? Ah!" and he shrieked piercingly.

Gueret was withdrawing quietly out of sight

while Paul and his new friend were supporting and restraining the sick man, who had raised himself with a sudden energy and was throwing himself about vehemently. But Louis called to him, "Where are you going? Are you going to tell her I am dying already? Did she send you to kill me?"

"No," said Gueret soberly. "I was waiting to see of what service I could be to you now you are suffering, and now I am going because you do not like my presence." He added, as he saw that Louis was calmed for the moment: "But I shall still try to be of use to you, because I know that that is what the young lady you speak of would wish."

"Stay then, stay then," murmured Louis hastily, "stay then, since she sends you—perhaps she will come herself by-and-by."

Gueret sat down at the foot of the bed, but it did not do: Louis was contented to have him there, but his presence, associated too vividly with yesterday's distress, agitated him fearfully and he became more and more delirious, now raving

furiously against the traitress, now weeping piteously over his darling's absence, now commanding, now imploring Gueret to bring her back.

"Listen, then," he whispered to him mysteriously after an interval of exhaustion, "bring her to me before they fill up my grave; do not tell her I am there, she will not recognize me when I am dead. Then I shall stretch out my arms suddenly and keep her there with me," and he smiled over the happy scheme.

When the doctor came, he said, "There is hope yet." How could he have said more plainly, "Look for the worst?" When days and nights of anxious watching have passed and, fevered and worn, you look with tremulous sight on the changed face that has ceased to try to smile on you, thinking with a shiver, "The end cannot be far off now;" that word would seem to you thrice blessed—"There is hope yet;" a happiness almost past belief, not to be dwelt upon lest the awakening from that delusion should be too cruel at last: but in the first hours of the illness, when you look to be told soothingly how wrong you

were to be alarmed, that the worst of the attack is over, a little care and good nursing and this medicine three times a day and all will be well soon; and instead of that you hear an encouraging voice, through which in remembering it you will fancy you heard the loud echo of a No, tell you that there is hope yet, is it not something hard to bear—like despair striking chill into your heart?

Paul heard it in an agony, he talked as if his brother were already dead: "Oh, heavens," he moaned, "how shall I tell it to our mother?—and she cannot leave that infirm old man, he would die without her care—she will not be able to look on her son's face before he is laid in the earth, here, far from his ancestors, far from where our father will soon sleep. Oh, Louis! death for thee!—it is too terrible." And then he remembered the siren who had lured him to England and then left him, and he cursed her bitterly, reviling her baseness with harsh rage. Would Lesley have recognised herself in this treacherous woman whose name he did not know? But after all

it was true that through her Louis lay stricken down.

Only the Englishman could succeed in bringing Paul to reason; Gueret, calm himself, could not communicate his calmness to the young man, but the Englishman seemed to exert a quiet control over him by his downright manner and show of indifference. The bewildered Paul obeyed his directions with docility: poor fellow, he was of little use in the sick room, unnerved as he was, but he clung to the thought that his brother was reassured when, in the intervals from delirium, he recognized him near him, and he devoted himself to him with a dog-like faithfulness.

In these intervals, dreamy and puzzled, Louis shewed an odd predilection for the presence of Gueret—of his English friend, Paul's constant support, he took little notice, seeming to take his being there as a matter of course, without question. But through the nine wild days of his fever it was to the nurse the doctor had sent that his eyes were oftenest turned—she was Desirée, his darling, his wife—he wooed her as in the old days

of his courtship—he would snatch at her hand and caress it tenderly. Sometimes his fancy changed, she was Desirée still, but cruel, angry, reproaching him, leaving him : then he would go over the scene of that passionate morning and implore her forgiveness, he would try to throw himself at her feet; she, good woman, understanding nothing of his outlandish ravings, listened with her fat face steady and dull, and with the needful equanimity of her office smoothed the tumbled bed and waited ready with the draught.

One day Louis imagined that Lesley was dead—somehow he had killed her. There she was lying white and still across the foot of his bed. Hour after hour he saw her, her pale face upturned, and the hands, one with a gold ring on its third finger, folded on her breast.

Then he thought that, while he was still imploring her for forgiveness, she had risen slowly, very slowly, and turned the death-fixed face towards him, utterly calm, loveless, and angerless. He saw her pass quietly away—only at the last she turned and beckoned him.

He said to Paul, "Now I know that I shall die. I am not dreaming now, I am awake and calm, and I tell thee I have seen her dead and she beckoned me to follow her. I feel death by me."

And looking on his face Paul must believe him.

CHAPTER X.

A FEW YEARS BACK.

SIX years before Louis de l'Aubonne and Lesley Hawthorn were pronounced man and wife to so little purpose, there had been a quarrel between two lovers—no, not lovers, but two young people who partly thought themselves lovers, and would have been, no doubt, had not this misunderstanding intervened.

I must correct myself again: I suppose *misunderstanding* implies some tangible cause of dispute, something which a distinct explanation might remove. But this was a mere wilful bickering, a war with no *casus belli*, or none ostensible.

It was the lady's fault; or, at any rate, she began the quarrel. Whether the blame of her

feeling piqued to do so was to be laid on her own unreasonableness alone I do not say; she did not think so at the time; though she did later. But then that was when she had received some small wrong at the gentleman's hands, and of course was anxious to persuade herself that she and not he was responsible for it. So her second thoughts need go for no more than the first.

The lady at the time had but newly grown up into sufficient maturity to assume that title of womanhood; so newly that she was still in bondage to her honours, and afflicted with all the exacting dignity of the transitional states in all social greatnesses—whether the aristocratic eminence attained by the parvenu millionaire, or the queen-dom in polite life which young ladies are allowed to exercise (or to fancy they exercise, which does just as well), in compensation for their domestic bondage. For she was scarcely more than a child, though looking so much older that she had to grow younger every year from then in order to look her true age by-and-by at twenty. She was good-looking, and more: but see how indistinct is word-

portraiture; if I were to describe her appearance I must use nearly the same terms as for Lesley Hawthorn, yet the two were distinctly unlike. And Lesley was far the most beautiful. Neither of the faces was marred by that symmetrical dullness which is called regularity of feature, but this girl's features were less harmoniously combined; the bright bloom of her cheeks was not so transparent, her eyes were keener and harder bright. She might have the advantage in form; both were tall and shapely, but hers was of fuller outline, in better proportion to the height; yet Lesley's, from its very deficiency, had a fragile gracefulness which the other could not rival. And though each possessed the inconvenient charm of changing expression, in general this girl's had a too eager vivacity, far less winning than Lesley's softer look of interest. That her lip at this time was often set in the contemptuous curl which it always assumed instinctively in her disdainful moments, was, I think, owing more to the heroines of certain novels being in the habit of displaying a "haughty bearing," and a "scornful beauty," than to an unamiable

tone of mind, or even than to the capability of impetuous scorn real in her nature.

I have used the word "rival" above; it suggests to me to explain that it is not because of such a connection or disconnection between these two that I have made this comparison, but because I am allowed to hope that any one who has cared to follow the story to the end of the seventh chapter (not being thereto compelled) must have taken sufficient interest in it to receive some sort of portrait of its heroine on the mental camera; and it seems a likely plan of presenting the heroine of the present chapter to such a one to describe her with reference to that portrait, always hoping that he may by-and-by form for himself a true likeness of her also. For a woman's looks are so large a part of her personality, they are so greatly influenced by it and so greatly influence it, that you cannot individualize her apart from them. And the writer has failed in his book if the reader has not individualized its characters.

But for men, in books or out of them, the outward presentment imports far less, (though some-

thing too,) their individuality being largely expressed in their outer lives with their greater space for movement and more angular contact with the world. Their looks do not operate upon their characters to anything like the same extent, because they are not the standard by which they are judged; you think of the man himself apart from them.

Therefore I do not care to describe the other actor in this little episode in two diverging lives further at present than to say that he looked a gentleman—an English gentleman, with the power of an athlete and the refinement of a scholar—but not a handsome one. In after years he was more so than now, but never with any accurate beauty.

But the beauty of an Antinous would not have served him with Miss Annesley, who utterly disregarded that quality in a man, valuing it only in her own sex where she recognized it with a quite masculine enthusiasm; and, on the other hand, he had the very gifts, moral and mental, which could most incline her in his favour. She, who was always ready to run a tilt against "les convenances" wherever and whenever she chose to consider

them tyrannical or dishonest, appreciated his quiet independence of the voice of that incomprehensible uncomprehending legislator surnamed The World. Her strong will, because it was a woman's strong will, was prepared to find a proud pleasure in yielding to his man's strong will surer and masterful, she would be glad to lay down her self-reliance and rest on the wisdom and the love of one whose superiority she could feel: she liked to have her imperiousness met by his firm self-assertion. Then her somewhat fierce truthfulness met with no shock in him; what she meant by honour and generosity he meant, and she had penetration—or instinct—enough to discover in him, deeper than his daily self, that secret and sensitive tenderness which sometimes makes a strong nature a high one: it gave her faith in his. In fact she understood him. She thought he also understood her, but in that she was mistaken; he never possessed her sympathetic insight; if he had he would have been one of those men from whom true poets are made.

She understood him so well that her judgment

of him in those early days was more true of him afterwards than at the time. She knew what he could be—must be, unless in some miserable way he sank beneath himself, as such men have done before now—and, in part even consciously, she measured him by the future more than by the present. Child almost as she was herself, she discerned the incompleteness of *his* youth.

He also divined it; but being clever, and what was more, *proved* clever in a brilliant university career, he was not disposed to allow others, and especially this child, whom he was inclined to think he loved, to make him recognize it; and though she had an exaggerated respect for intellect and surely gave him credit for what he possessed, he was suspicious of her on that point.

Did he love her? He generally thought he did; he was often sure of it, even passionately; and after this quarrel he was *always* sure of it. Yet it may well be that he was pleased by her frank preference, piqued by her little assumptions and petulances, rather than led to her by that deep affection which alone he would have called love—

for he was inwardly given to sentiment, though he was a poor man, and knew he was called on to be a prudent one.

Did she love him then? She very rarely thought she did, very rarely thought about it at all: and she was the more borne out in considering herself fancy free that she could speak of him, and even praise him, freely in any society. But she was easily to be offended by him, firing up at quite imaginary slights; and she was very changeable in her opinion of his attentions to her, believing at one time that he was the true lover she would wish to be the *one* of her life, at another, that he was only the well-meaning friend she chose always to imply to him that she considered him, and sometimes in a sudden anger—or would it be a sudden alarm?—wholly doubting him and chafing at herself that a mere man flirt could think he might play with her at his fancy. And she was pettishly anxious that he should not think her careful to please him. “I won’t have any man think I’m preparing to receive an offer—not even to say “No thank you” to it—that he isn’t prepared

to make" was a thing she had often said, but she had not acted on it so vehemently or so fitfully with some people.

It looks as if she, if she did not love the most of these two, was likely to love the most—it looks at least to those who know how to take it. But she was so young that her heart had not grown to its self-knowledge, and there was hardly soil enough of thought for a love to take an indestructible root there.

The thing had begun when she was no more than fifteen, and ever since, that is some time over a year, there had been much talk about it in the gossipries of the place, and Mrs Annesley was beginning to regret that she had not stood in the way in time. When she thought of it it was too late; she desired her daughter's marriage and was quite sure that if she loved this man nothing would prevail on her to give her hand to another, nor would she have urged her to a step which her own principle condemned. She could but depreciate the, to her at all events, unwelcome wooer, and point out to her daughter all possible and im-

possible reasons for doubting his being one in earnest. The effect of which was that the girl grew more wilful both to the accuser and the accused and was in a constantly restless mood—except when the latter was out of her way altogether at college; an exception which made her doubt her having any affection for him and by some odd process of reasoning disbelieve the existence of any in him for her.

Nevertheless she had owned to herself a kind of foreknowledge of the love she would give him if he once fairly wooed it, and she felt aggrieved. For he, while taking into consideration many questions of happiness and expediency and of fairness to her, had forgotten to take her feelings into consideration too, and never thought how detrimental the uncertain position in which he had placed her towards himself must be to a young girl, especially as she was so very young that it completely bewildered her. It was not unreasonable indeed to tell himself that since, with only three hundred a year and the choice of his profession, he could neither marry a young lady with

no present fortune nor foresee the fulfilment of an engagement with any certainty, he ought not to fetter her youth with such a tie, but then it would have been well (in that case) to refrain from a line of conduct necessarily inducing her and moreover the lookers on (who in a country neighbourhood consist of all the inhabitants) to infer that he had argued in a less prudent sense.

They were both young enough for it to be much better for them to wait before they thought of such things, but since he had not waited nor allowed her to wait, but had allowed his fancy so far to overcome his prudence and place them in a doubtful relation, painful for her and only half creditable to him, it might have been better, if he cared for her in earnest, to meet the situation with a bold face and leave her "interests" in her own hands.

All this this child, whom he, being four or five years older, thought quite incapable of pondering it "au sérieux," felt strongly, and her young dignity was fretted by it. Still she found herself drawn unawares into a closer and closer inter-

course with her uncertain lover, and when he left home to keep his last term at college, something so near an understanding was established between them that she began to tease herself with the mortifying idea, suggested in the first instance by her mother, that she had allowed a man to think her at his refusal, to be taken or left as suited his whim by-and-by.

So that when, his degree taken, not without some scholarly eclat, and his friends about Alderford, and she most, looking for him to hasten to their congratulations, he lingered on with no evident necessity, clinging to the apron-strings of his Alma Mater after she had given him leave to journey from her, writing B.A. on the labels of his luggage if he felt so disposed, as freckle-faced John Higgs, the son of his uncle's worthy but ungrammatical tenant Farmer Higgs, had done on the very day when that academic title was bestowed on him, Miss Annesley became irritated and, pronouncing in her own mind that if he had cared for her he would not have stayed away now, resolved to make him see that she was as in-

dependent of him for her happiness as he was of her for his.

And, to put the climax to her indignation, not many days before he did return she heard talk of his trying for a fellowship—which must certainly be a thing derogatory to him as gentleman born since John Higgs was going to have one, and which, as Mrs Annesley pointed out, was even a profession precluding matrimony, so that she looked on his conduct very nearly as she might have done had she lived before the Reformation and heard that her lover thought of becoming a candidate for the priesthood.

He came home at length and the next day appeared, as was his duty, as a morning caller in Mrs Annesley's little drawing room in her little cottage behind the church of Alderford, the small market town, which also called him parishioner. Mrs Annesley was not likely to fail in courtesy even had she disliked him, which she did not, but *the* welcome he had expected was not forthcoming. As he sat and tried to be interesting on subjects in which at that moment he felt no

particle of interest he could see Miss Annesley loitering along the garden walk, gathering the sweet June roses from the standards on each side and leisurely arranging them, bending a spray here and setting a leaf there with coaxing fingers, as if no one particular were being kept waiting.

She had her flowers in her hand when she came in, so that she had to lay them down carefully before she could give him the tips of her fingers to shake, and then, as they were a little disarranged, had to gather them together again and dispose them as tastefully as before. There was no incivility in her occupying herself thus, as it did not prevent her from following the conversation with a careless remark and a smile now and then, but he was dissatisfied, and as her remarks expressed no interest in him beyond surprise—surprise at his return to so dull a place so soon, surprise to find that it really was so many months since they had seen him, when you came to count, surprise that he should hesitate about going abroad at once, as his uncle advised—neither they nor the smiles were acceptable.

To punish her he took occasion to observe that he had never passed so thoroughly enjoyable a time as the last few months, and made honourable mention of various pleasant entertainments and pleasant people contributing to this unusual enjoyment. But Miss Annesley, though she coloured a little at first, showed no annoyance and made her little comments with the most serenely polite indifference—though, to be sure, considering that they had known each other from childhood, the serenity and the politeness and the indifference were too perfect not to betoken some secret anger.

He could have spared the considerateness with which she advised him not to go to a certain tea and gossip party on the following evening. He knew from old experience that she was quite right, that the evening's amusement was of a depressing tendency to the minds of the uninured, but as she was going herself such care on his behalf might seem uncalled for.

He hinted so much to her. "Oh," she said, laughing, very likely at heart *fiendishly*, as our forefathers the romance writers call it, but out-

wardly with as merry a trill as ever parted school-girl's lips: "Mama and I have no choice, Miss Jones seized upon us unawares as we came from church last Sunday, but you can still escape for you haven't got her note yet and are not supposed to know it is coming. Besides, we mean to come home very early but you will not be allowed to get away so easily—walking late doesn't matter for a gentleman."

That meant, "Don't think you are to walk home with me in the old way."

He took his leave that afternoon in no pleasant humour. Of course he did go to Miss Jones's tea-party, however. He might have some guess that his unkind lady would not be conciliated, but altogether the contrary, by his taking her advice.

But here it was worse than before. The party was as dull as tea parties in Alderford and above all the tea parties of Miss Jones (fussiest and most judicial of spinsters) inevitably turned out, but Miss Annesley chose to be in her highest spirits and after her wont, when in a mischievous

humour, preferring to spend her superfluous criticism on the present rather than the absent, of course selected the object at once of her greatest interest and her greatest indignation to fly her shafts at, and became satirical and impertinent, not to say rude, to him.

Naturally satire, under the circumstances, was an assumption of superiority which he could not allow, and he attempted to defeat her with her own weapons. Of course he failed and made matters worse : she being a lady had manifestly the advantage in attacking ("Strike a woman!" you know, and the rule holds good metaphorically) and his show of fight only gave her the right of fiercer assault. Miss Annesley's tongue grew so keen that Miss Jones felt called on to point out next day to her two special friends, the clergyman's serious sisters, that "it was very plain what game that precocious chit was playing, setting up quarrels with a young man like last night—she wanted to get a husband before better trained girls left off their pinafores and learning to sew." And her opponent thought, "What a fool I was to think the girl cared for

me!" He was wholly routed, and then both combatants became cross and silent.

Neither of them arose very self-satisfied next morning: the lady felt uncomfortably that she had been wanting in dignity and had lapsed into the pertness of a forward school girl; the gentleman perceived that his retorts if less stinged than hers flew less lightly, he could not play with edged tools as she a woman and a *child*-woman could, he had been too much in earnest and he felt himself guilty of discourtesy. And each of them was quite as clear sighted to the other's short coming.

They met in the course of that day. Miss Annesley went down into the valley beneath her mother's house to finish her sketch of the rustic bridge with its back-ground of sun and shadow-flickered elms. And as she sat at work with the shadow of a screen of brambles dipping over her forehead and her feet buried in the long grass, while a whole sky of blue forget-me-nots looked up at her from the water half-a-dozen inches below, and the merry little brook

glittered and quivered along, gossiping so quaintly of all the happiness and beauty of its free life in fields and woodlands under the summer sky that she could not choose but listen to it and lose her own thoughts, came with his fishing-rod the person she should have been thinking of for true love's sake but was not.

"Miss Annesley is very much engrossed in her sketching." That was the first she heard of his neighbourhood.

"Yes," she said quickly with cheeks flushed like sunset, "I was trying to get my sketch finished. But it is time for me to go home."

"Pray do not let *me* drive you away. I am going farther on along the stream."

"No, it is don't let *me* drive *you* away. I am going home," and she began to pack up sketch-book and pencils.

There would have been nothing in what either of them said if they could have contrived to find kinder voices to say it in, and it was quite evident that the young lady could not in any propriety spend a romantic afternoon there with this

unexpected companion, but Miss Annesley's lover felt insulted, and Miss Annesley would not have disliked had it been allowable to go through the vulgar process of "giving a bit of her mind," ending up no doubt with a good cry.

Her packing was finished in silence before he had time to think of an answer at once sufficiently ill-tempered and sufficiently polite. She bowed, turning to go—"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon—I trust I have not disturbed you before you intended to go. Perhaps I should say 'good-bye' though, Miss Annesley, I shall certainly call if I have time, before going, but I may be prevented."

"Going! so soon!" she said, thrown off her guard.

"Yes; what have I to keep me here?" he answered sentimentally.

"Ah, to be sure," replied the wilful girl choosing to misunderstand him, "this *is* a very dull place. I think you quite right to go I'm sure—only I fancied your uncle wanted you to stay longer."

"Well, I cannot flatter myself that you share his wish—very evidently," he said bitterly.

"I? Oh no. I always advise people to go from such a quiet place as this, unless they have quiet tastes that suit it, or happen to like it by some prejudice as I do and you don't."

"Why do you say I don't like it?"

"Because you are in a hurry to leave it, and stayed away so long."

"I am glad you were good enough to know it was long."

He meant it at heart but he said it half sneeringly, not meaning it so very deeply as to be *forced* to speak it with lover-like warmth, and being still out of humour. He made the girl furious, of course, though she took it quietly enough, merely saying, "Well, it was long if you come to count the time—from somewhere in the autumn wasn't it? Though the days do pass so quickly that nothing seems really long."

But when he went on to say, "Oh pray do not think I ventured to hope I was missed," she turned upon him angrily.

"No, I do not think you 'ventured to hope' any thing of the kind. Let *me* venture to hope that you never will."

"I don't know by what right you talk to me in this way," she added petulantly.

"Miss Annesley!—really I was not aware—I must apologise if I have given offence. I did not know we were supposed to be talking so much in earnest."

"I do not know that it matters whether we were talking in earnest or not. Presumption is quite as disrespectful in jest as in earnest, I believe."

"Allow me to assure you that I have no wish to presume in *any* manner, certainly not in the one you imagine."

"Thank you—you are forgiven. Now I must really wish you good afternoon. Or good-bye, is it?"

He fancied her voice was a little sadder in the last words, and he fancied that his words with their insulting meaning which he did not mean were bitter to her. He was willing to prolong the

conversation, thinking it might float towards some more favourable current.

"I really had not meant to offend you; I suppose I was inconsiderate."

"Yes." She said shortly. "Well, good-bye, in case I don't see you again."

They shook hands inimically, and their love matter was at an end then and there.

You see if they had been engaged there could have been a little forget-and-forgive scene, or even if they had parted in an absolute quarrel he might have apologized; she of course could not do that, but being the beginner of the war she could have accepted the apology pleasantly and the end of it might have been a plighting of troths and whispering of soft contrition. Either way it might have been the burden of the old song over again, "The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love." But there was nothing for it in this case but to let bygones be bygones and begin again. And the same two people cannot begin again in a thing of this kind very easily. If these two had arisen in a dissatisfied mood in the morning, in what frame

do you think they betook themselves to rest at night?

The end of the matter—we are playing at a game of consequences in this chapter, what the lady said to the gentleman, what the gentleman to the lady, and so on—the end of the matter was that the gentleman, constrained by this parting at the brook (since it would have been so ridiculous for him not to take his departure after all, as if he had held it over her as a threat), went abroad much sooner than he wished or had intended, and went in a moody and generally blighted state of mind, believing himself to have been much more in love and much worse used than he had been, and running much risk of the Locksley-Hall developement without reforming in final stanzas; and that the lady married for money.

Yes, indisputably, she married for money. Mrs Annesley saw the “detrimental” go off the stage with satisfaction, fully believing that her own design was better for her daughter’s happiness, and immediately the way was made ready for a new-comer favoured of Plutus and of Mrs Annesley.

Miss Annesley was indignant. "Mama! would *you* have sold yourself?"

"No, indeed; nor will I have you do anything so wrong;" *sinful* was the word on the tip of the mother's tongue, but she changed it; it was a little too strong, for perhaps in her deepest heart she was not convinced by her own arguments; "but you will never be in love romantically like some girls, weaker and gentler than you are, and you do like this man—like him I'm sure at least better than any one else you know."

"Yes," owned the daughter; for she had never chosen to think she sorrowed for the lost lover. And wondering secretly that she had suffered no more, she thought it must be true that she could not fall in love romantically like some girls, and was rather sorry for it and ashamed as for a deficiency in her nature. Nor had it occurred to her to find in that quarrel the reason why all the days seemed so dull and long now and she so weary wishful for any change.

She could not have been taken in better mood; Mrs Annesley presently rejoiced in success. She

had provided well for her daughter's fortunes, and the girl was not sentimental—not so much even as would have been pleasing in one so young; she had given her a wise and kind husband, whom she could respect and did; and though he was over twice her age a man is not old at forty.

But she had done better than this. She had a stepson, unruliest of spendthrifts, who wasted her substance pretty nearly at his will. For she had in her mind that not uncommon confusion between impartiality and preference for the side on which there can be least partiality which is the cause of so much generous dishonesty in honourable people; and her husband having left her free control of his property she, being above the temptation of sacrificing his son's interests to those of her own child, went the other way, and, as if forgetting that her own child had rights from the father too, made it a virtue to allow no thought of providing for the little one to limit his expenditure.

The young man was grateful to her for it, though his gratitude rather took the course of shewing her his appreciation of her generosity by fresh

calls upon it; he felt she was a good woman, and he liked her and petted and caressed her, while he nearly broke her heart, just as he would have done had she been his real mother. And she perhaps could sympathize better with this careless ne'er-do-well full of lazy selfishness and going on his way like any hundred of ne'er-do-wells, than with her wilful girl, full of impulse, uncertain as the winds and as wild, always trying at some impossible out-of-the-way goodness (not content with the every-day, alas! not even equal to it), always learning something that there was not the slightest necessity for her knowing, and working at it as ne'er-do-well ought to have done at all the subjects in which he was plucked over and over again at college. The girl puzzled and disturbed her, she did not think either that she was so fond of her mother as she should have been—"My own child loves me less than my step-son does," thought Mrs Annesley, forgetting that she, who in her undemonstrative nature never touched her girl's forehead with her lips but to bid her good night nor spoke a gentler word to her than to her servants,

had not encouraged her to the show of affection which Ralph found it convenient to make and had no sensitive reticences to hinder.

But, though this might be, it was really in the lofty notion that her husband's property should go as if he had never given his son a dowerless step-mother, that Mrs Annesley resolved to make it all his excepting a bare life-pittance for her daughter. And just now young Annesley was in pecuniary difficulties so many and so complicated that to extricate him nearly all the remaining fortune must be sacrificed, and the retaining for her daughter this provision, which it so happened had been arranged in such a manner that by making it over to Ralph more immediate relief would accrue to him than by any other means in her power, weighed on her mind as almost an injustice to him. It was a question whether his commission—it had pleased him after acceding to the wish hinted by certain authorities at Oxford for his absence from that University for at least a time, to go into the army—whether his commission could be saved at any sacrifice Mrs Annesley

was able to make, but make all and any sacrifice she must and would, and what was to be done with the girl?

All this the girl knew but she hesitated.

"I would not have you marry with any dislike, or even without a real affection," her mother urged; "but you do like him. And you have given him decided encouragement."

"Oh, mama! you don't think it? And I did not guess what he wanted even till you told me yourself."

"You must have known and not owned it to yourself—girls do these things. But at all events you have gone so far that he must feel you bound in honour to accept him."

It was not wholly true—not that Mrs Annesley would have lied, but she wished it to be true and helped herself to believe it so; yet it was true in part, enough to alarm this girl, so inexperienced and so proud. She held honour very high.

Still it was not enough yet. But it became evident that her brother's affairs could not be set right without giving up all that was for her, nay

not without her mother being relieved of the expense of supporting her, and Mrs Annesley was growing ill with anxiety and bidding fair to starve herself with economies ; her sacrifice was necessary to her mother and her brother ; self-sacrifice is a glorious thing, hiding many evils. The eagle may look at the sun and not be dazzled blind, but not the unfledged eaglets : the girl was no eagle yet, she looked and all swam before her eyes. You know the maxim of some good people—if you doubt which of two courses is right (or some would almost have it whether you doubt or not) take the one which is repugnant to you and you may be sure you have done well : this girl reasoning thus took the course she liked least. She was a wife at seventeen.

Mrs Annesley thanked God ; her daughter had a good husband (that was true) and was happy with him (that was nearly true), and she herself was able to give all she had to ne'er-do-well. And dying in her daughter's arms a year after she could say, " God bless you, my child, you thought

you were making a sacrifice and you left me able to do my duty by my husband's son."

The old admirer, all but forgotten by that time, was the man who came to the rescue of the brothers de l'Aubonne on the night of Louis's wedding day.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER FRESH START.

Was it spring or summer? Far away in the country, where the lanes were still fresh with the green hawthorn shoots before the ripeness and dusk from the warm months had come upon them, and the dainty pale primroses were all a-bloom, and you might find the last violet perhaps under the lush leaves, you knew that it was spring, bright and warm as few springs are now-a-days, when, instead of going a-maying blithely on the merry first of May the old tales talk of, we may be dolefully warming ourselves by the fire, thinking when the sunny days will come. But in a street of the great town the last two or three days might be taken for summer ones, and on this close night with the window open yet no chill

through the room, and the large moon quite yellow opposite in the sky, spring seemed weeks away, left behind clinging to the dead old winter.

Paul had fallen asleep leaning uncomfortably in his chair; the moonlight falling on his face showed it worn and wearied, to look at him he himself might have been brought to death's door by some sharp bout of illness—nay in that wan light you might have thought, but for the glistening under the eyelashes that showed sorrow and dreaming left to him, that a dead man had slept a while ago into his last sleep and rested in it there yet undiscovered.

The lights had burned down while he was sitting there, but his companion had not cared to disturb him by procuring others; he had crept to the windows and softly drawn up the blinds that they might not be in darkness if they were suddenly called for, and then he had quietly resumed his watch.

His thoughts were busy. He had asked before Paul succumbed to that lassitude from fatigue and anxiety, "Tell me what was that trinket your

brother was clutching in that last frenzy fit." And Paul had answered, "It was a bracelet of that cursed girl's. He asked for something of hers, Monsieur Gueret possessed that (the infamous creature she gives him too souvenirs!)—and, as he refused to deliver the packet she left for Louis into any other keeping and we dared not agitate him with that matter now, he placed that in his hand, and"—

He broke down, remembering how Louis seized the bauble complaining and pleading to it as if it had possessed a portion of his lost love's sentient humanity in it and could hear and pity him. Then he became ironical: "The fine complaisance! Monsieur Gueret lends it to the dying man to console him—no doubt the dying man himself had given it to the miserable woman who has killed him. That makes it more interesting." It was soon after that outburst that he had fallen asleep.

"So the bracelet was hers," mused his companion. "I thought as much. That girl must have a wonderful gift of fascination! the brother says she's not beautiful too—but to be sure his

feeling against her may prejudice him ; that poor Louis thinks her a marvel—I wonder he didn't marry her, after all ; bad as she may be his conduct, so far as I can see, really had been unfair to her—inexcusably so, I should say. Poor fellow, *her* bracelet."

And he went on modulating on that theme. He constructed these two persons' romance—but not as it was, for he had heard but a garbled and imperfect account and he looked through the light that the love passion he had seen in the man threw on it. Yet he was lenient on the woman's levity and egotism, he imagined excuses, temptations. He was a man who was willing to judge no woman harshly.

"I have heard none of the particulars," he thought, "I do not even know the principal facts : I have gathered something of a complicated story—a very puzzling story, for what were those rights in France the girl wanted ? and why couldn't he give them to her ?—gathered it in this poor warm-hearted Paul's outbursts, and one can't get anything very clear from them ; for anything I know

the two women might be able to make out a case for themselves. Who am I to say hard things of them?" So he was forbearing.

He thought too of what it might be if the news came to that girl that her lover was dead—"God knows she will have punishment enough then," and he could be sorry for her; and then he forgot her and, as was natural in that room on that night, thought of death. You know what it is to think of that directly, in earnest, to think of it apart from the vagueness that is beautiful over it in poetry, the shadow and dimness of rest, to think of it with circumstance—the death of one lying still alive in the next room to you now—your own death. It wants a strong mental effort and some courage to do that. This man who, as the phrase goes, did not know fear (that is he did know it, saw what it meant and was its master), being led in thinking of another to think of himself, dared to think distinctly of his death and could face it in that form almost as easily as he would do in reality—the last is known to be the easier of the two. Then he began to

ponder that mysterious Whither? and How? and when the mind has once started on that road it does not soon turn back measuring the passing time. So his watch seemed to him neither long nor short, though the sleeper knew all the while that the time was long and was weary of it in his dreams.

By-and-by a step moved stealthily along an inner room and the door was softly unclosed: he went to it, listened to a whisper, answered with a whisper, and came back opposite the sleeper with a doubtful face, "Shall I awake him?" Paul looked so troubled in his rest that it was a question whether it was not worse than waking, especially now. But he decided to leave him to himself. "He seems quieter just now—even this sleep may refresh him—and if I rouse him he will be startled and imagine the worst. He is in no safe state for excitement." So he left him to sleep on and returned to his own thoughts.

This time they were of life. Was it not an awful gift if it were to be made to a man a second

time? As if he were meant to begin anew and make a better story of it this time. As if he were snatched from death that he might do something a while longer in the world and in a higher and more purposeful way than he had thought of before. He remembered the words of an old formulary, "to continue Christ's faithful servant and soldier to his life's end:" they were great words and brave and he thought how a man sent out on trial a second time, having wavered from them oftentimes before, might take them again for his oath of fealty and see if better might not come of it.

"It is better for a man to die and make an end of it at once," he said to himself, "than begin to live again and make no better a thing of it than he did before."

Presently he remembered, "It's the common folly of waiting for a beginning—why don't *I* start to make a better thing of it than before? *Must* one come to death's door for a starting-point? This is Tuesday, the—the something or other—why shouldn't one begin because it is

Tuesday the whatever the date may be? That is quite starting-point enough. If it were new-year's day one would say what an opportunity for a new beginning; and what difference would it make? Tuesday is the third day of the week, my father was a third son—won't that do?"

And when he had relapsed into more general reverie for a little while he returned to his thought again: "What I have to do I suppose is to become a usefulness. I'm no idle man: and I don't do myself much harm, but I don't know that I do any one else any good—excepting what's fair to my tenants—they say I succeed there—well, and I improve the estate,—but there must be more to do than that—there is more done at Ormeboys, I hear"—helper's work, "as she used to call it when she made her grand girl's plans for reforming society—mender's work, too, wanted in some quarters, I should say, and why on earth haven't I looked to it? I'd go down home now and see what there is to do thereabout if there were time to do it properly—or any time at all; but I can't in fairness to the rest delay my

journey longer. I must keep faith and start to-morrow evening, now I can leave this young fellow."

He was to have left town a couple of days after that on which he met with the De l'Aubonnes, but had remained on their account, in spite of the grumblings of his friends, who were already waiting for him on the other side of the Channel. He was all Paul's support, and what the poor fellow would have done without him I cannot say; when it was at the worst with Louis they were forced to keep him from the room, his self-control could not be relied on, and he clung to the presence of his new friend, who scolded and advised him as if he had been a little child, to save him from his despairing self. The man who sat near him at present, remembering that he might be of more use in the world than he was, had done some good service here.

There was a glimmering light of dawn slowly growing through the room when Paul awoke with a faint cry, startled at the sound of the gentle closing of a window—the morning chill had come,

and his friend was thoughtful for him. "What are you doing? what is it?" he asked confused. "Louis?—"

Then he remembered before there was time for an answer: "I have fallen asleep while we were watching! My God! I have fallen asleep and my brother was dying, miserable that I am! Hush! do not tell me—it is dawn and he is dead!" And he threw himself on the ground like a woman and sobbed aloud.

"But he is not dead:" he was answered distinctly and calmly, "and you are very wrong and very weak to lie tossing there—you will make yourself heard in the next room, and disturb your brother from the first wholesome sleep he has had for days."

"Sleep!" cried Paul, "*He is not dead!* He is asleep safely! He is out of danger! My God, my God! can it be true?"

"Sit down quietly, my friend, you will do as much harm with your foolish rejoicing as you were going to do lying there moaning over your fancy."

This was not want of feeling, it was the way to manage Paul, taught by experience,

"Sit down and I will tell you," he repeated, "and keep quiet, whatever you do."

Paul sat down—he knew he was not likely to be told if he did not obey—and by a miraculous effort he kept quiet.

"In the night the nurse came to the door and told me the change had come at last, and that it was for the better. Do not cry out but thank God for it in your heart, if you never felt what it was to thank Him before since you were a child. The nurse said he had fallen asleep, and she would call us when he wakened. If he awakes as they expect there will be no danger to fear—except from weakness, I ought to say. Remember, to excite him may be to kill him."

Paul was weeping quietly, his companion turned away to the window, only repeating, "If you never prayed to God before since you were a child"—he knew it was so—"pray to Him now, my friend; it will do you good."

He could see the street now; soon the early

morning passers, few and far between, began to go by, the sky grew day blue and the night was forgotten. But for hours there was a hush still in those two rooms; morning *there* would be when Louis awoke.

At length a sound of voices was heard in the inner-room; Martin the valet came to the door. "You may come now if you please, Monsieur Paul, he is awake and is asking for you—but he is very weak still—they say he must not be agitated."

And Paul, trembling from head to foot, crept in and took his brother's hand and heard him say, "My brother, I am weak and ill; it is well that thou art with me."

CHAPTER XII.

LESLEY'S RIVAL.

WHAT a plain woman !

Oh take care, don't let her hear you. You forget what it is to a woman to be plain. Everywhere she hears and reads and in her own vexed heart she feels that it is her woman's birthright to be comely, and somehow she has missed her birthright. She carries that uneasy consciousness with her continually; your eye resting on her has given her pain; she fancies a mockery or a disgust in it. Perhaps a little while ago she was brightening a bit, forgetting the nervous haunting self in a sudden animation or even vaguely flattering herself—she who is never deceived herself as to her own inferiority—that you were deceived a little and had not noticed how sadly different she was from the

others, bright happy beings who need not blush when they see any one looking at them and think "He sees how ugly I am." Don't force the painful thought back on her; to her morbid sensitiveness it means that she is apart from her sisterhood, that she cannot be loved or even liked as they are, that her value can never be counted to others excepting by what drudging use they may have of her, nor their kindness to her excepting by their pity. She is wrong no doubt to give way to this kind of feeling, and she overstates the case; yet so long as pretty women are looked on with kinder eyes and judged in a gentler way than ugly women (and who can help that weakness, if weakness it be), you cannot say that her misfortune has no reality; and it is such rough criticisms as that of yours that press it upon her too sharply.

No, if she is bitter a little, make excuse for her and let her go by; if she is stupid and dull, tolerate her just a little while; if she is womanly and agreeable, be as courteously compassionate to her as if she were not plain; you will very likely presently forget that she is, and she will perceive that

and be the better for it. But, if you can do nothing else for her, at least be careful not to make her aware that all your thought of her is that "What a plain woman!"

Poor little Stephanie, how many times she had heard that said or seen it looked! When she was a child and people fancied that she would not understand that they were talking of her she used to hear her mother and her nurse and the friends of the family (*amies intimes* who were privileged to condole over unpleasant matters) nay the very villagers who met the little lady in her walks with her attendants and stopped to say a word to Fanchon and Lisette wondering how she came to be so deficient in beauty, so unlike her mother and the lovely little sister who died before she could remember. The poor little girl understood them all well enough then, though some were so considerate as to make a lefthanded attempt at deceiving her, pretending that they were talking of some stranger little girl in whom she could have no possible interest: but Stephanie was neither more obtuse nor more indifferent to such remarks about herself

than other children are, nor was her memory less tenacious; years after she was humiliated and saddened by the recollection of them. They made her keener at detecting the more covert allusions hazarded within her hearing as she began to grow up. As a girl she knew well that her parents were still annoyed at her plainness, and that it was the reason she was no one in the house of which she was the only daughter. And now, when the death of her brother, whom she hardly knew, for he was many years older than she was and did not care about his insignificant plain little sister, had made her important as *the* heiress of the neighbourhood, she had still, though treaties of marriage had been proposed often enough to her parents by other parents on behalf of sons who would have been the better for a good fortune with the bride, passed by four or five years, perhaps more, the age at which she might be considered *demoiselle à marier*, without ever having been told she was pretty, although she was a French girl and compliments are cheap in those parts. Poor Stephanie must needs know she was hopelessly plain.

Yet when she could talk at her ease a smile and a tender light would grow out of her brown eyes over the whole face that made it pleasant, so pleasant that whether it was pretty or plain you could not tell, no one would think of caring. But of course she might not, being *demoiselle à marier*, talk to gentlemen, so they could not find out that one charm, else some might have thought it great enough to make her lovable: and she could not talk to the dignified married ladies who came to visit her mother, it would have been forward in her to do more than answer their occasional notice in a diffident and unoriginating manner, just as if they had been gentlemen: and there were no young ladies of her own rank living near enough for her to have their companionship. And with her parents Stephanie had not learned to be at ease. So she was not often seen to advantage.

Hers was a dull vacuous life, but she did not know it. Not that she was either too clever or too stupid to weary of that monotony, for she was only at a fair mediocrity of intellect, but because she had known no other, and she had been well edu-

cated and knew that her religious duties and her embroidery were enough of interest in the day for a pious and modest girl to wish for: by-and-by her parents would choose a new destiny for her, but she could hardly hope it should be a happy one; she was so unattractive that her husband must hate her she thought.

She had no special talent to atone for her other deficiencies; she could not draw, she danced without grace, and she had little skill in music; but she had a sweet murmuring voice, like the cadence of a far off waterfall, and some ears might have found pleasant music in it. Crabbed M. de Fourrère liked to hear it. She was his other godchild, and she had to be dutiful to him and attentive. He was cross to her of course, but he liked her, and if anyone appreciated her it was he. And in spite of his crossness and crooked talk, it was he who oftenest saw that beautifying light grow out from her eyes.

She was reading to him on this summer day, her mother with her bonnet on sitting embroidering in the other window the while. Lat-

terly M. de Fourrère, who was a very old man, had begun to think that the longest life could not go on for ever, and that since he had grown too ailing and infirm to do anything else he had better begin to prepare for death: so Stephanie in her daily visits had to read to him from a devotional work making much mention of repentance and death and the merits and glorifications of various saints, to which he did not listen very intently, it is true, but yet with a satisfactory feeling that it was doing him good and soothed with the even murmur of the voice in his ear. Stephanie made no great emphasis or change of tone as she read. Either Madame de la Chatellerie, her mother, or Madame Lefort, dame de compagnie and monitress, always came with her, and when she had read a certain portion she closed the book and sat demurely listening to the conversation on worldly gossip matters between her companion and the invalid; now that he could not walk there was not often talk between her and him, because there was no more tête-à-tête.

"Here is Madame de l'Aubonne coming up the walk!" exclaimed Mde. de la Chatellerie suddenly.

It was a thing unusual enough to make it excusable that she interrupted the reading; Mde. de l'Aubonne was almost close prisoner to the house, she had her wife and nurse's heavy duties there. Indeed M. de Fourrière's old friend and contemporary, Casimir de l'Aubonne, was running a race with him to the grave, and the goal seemed not far off from either.

"She has brought news," croaked M. de Fourrière in his rusty old voice. "Make haste then, Stephanie, make haste child—how slowly you read—can you not get on and finish the portion before Mde. de l'Aubonne comes! Oh how stupid the child is!"

Stephanie was all the while jerking out her sentences breathlessly in order to get them finished in time—"turnomortalthenfromthecontemplationofthismiserableworldandfixthyhopefuleyeson thesplendourofeternity-Preparethyselfwithpatience andpenitence——"

Mde. de l'Aubonne was announced.

"Do make haste, child—One moment, dear madame, we are finishing."

"Forth'nd'fall thy earthly'maginations'nd vanities'nd knowth'th'igher thngs're waiting thee'nt' realm of saints'nd angels wherethou shaltth'nb'admitted'nd find th'r'ward pr'pared for thee t'all eternity—'nd sev'n-teenth portion."

"A thousand thanks for this visit, madame," said M. de Fourrière courteously to the new comer—she was a woman with whom every one was gentle. "Forgive me for delaying them a moment; when one is so near the brink of the grave as I find myself, even the pleasure of receiving you, madame, must not shorten a religious exercise."

"It is understood," said the beautiful lady—beautiful though years on from her last youth. "But you have hurried our poor little Stephanie out of breath on my account, and that is cruel."

"Oh, Stephanie is a good child, she does not mind, and I was impatient to hear of our young—young friend in England." He had been going to

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRODIGAL RETURNED.

LOUIS came home. He looked very much changed, he was pale and haggard, and, if he had seemed grave beside the rapid Paul before, now he seemed morose. The gloom of his thoughts when he did express them was painful, but he was of reticent nature and on the whole, though accustomed to be confidential with Paul and confessing with his mother, of reticent habit, and now even they were allowed to know but little of what was passing in his mind. The wicked siren whom Paul loathed in his heart was never mentioned between them. That whole perplexed affair was made a great forget of—Louis had had a dangerous illness, that was all.

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and find thy straw hat, thou hast left it in the garden—stay, do me the pleasure to gather a few of those grasses (Monsieur will kindly permit), they will improve our bouquets in the drawing-room.”

Stephanie went blushing: she knew very well why she was sent away. No one had ever told her, but she knew as well as if she had heard M. de Fourrière say to her mother two years ago, “That grave little Stephanie suits me; she is very good and gentle and I love the child; I must do something for her, but I cannot divide my estate, and I have promised it to the other. I shall marry her to him; does that suit you?” that she was to marry Louis de l'Aubonne. She neither repined nor was glad. Of course it was desirable to be married, she should have a place in the world and amusements and interests, instead of being nobody and living for nothing as it was with her now; and it would be nice to have the spending of fabulous wealth (few could venture to estimate the fortune that those two neighbour estates would represent when they were joined,

and Stephanie least of all—M. de Fourrère's alone, which would come first, was beyond her arithmetic), and to wear diamonds and to go to Paris and be seen at the Tuilleries. And Louis was very handsome—only so very grave—and he was not thirty years older than herself, like M. de Fontaines, who she was sure had nearly settled with her parents last year that he should be their son-in-law—and all the young ladies in the neighbourhood would envy her such a husband in their secret hearts. Only—The old sore galled her again, she felt that he could never conquer his aversion to her, she saw that her plainness repelled him, she was sure that the marriage must have been proposed to him such a look of repugnance came on his face sometimes as he spoke to her. She must be very unhappy with him if she ever came to love him—as of course she must do. If it had only been Paul! Paul was so gay, so courteous, and handsomer still than Louis, Stephanie thought; and she had an instinct that she could hope better to please Paul than his brother. He did

not care for her but he at least had no aversion for her, nobody had told *him* to marry her and made him loathe her by it, and he talked to her frankly so that she felt to trust in him and be at her best with him; so in time *he* might have come to think a little more favourably of her without knowing it. But Louis! that was very different.

She felt decidedly against the marriage to-day as she was choosing very slowly, for she must not come back too soon, among the feathery grasses and council was being held on it within doors. The indoor three, on the contrary, grew sanguine on their scheme.

"But Louis? Does he speak of it in his letter?" asked M. de Fourrère presently.

"Not at all. As I told you, his letter seemed to me at first to leave it hopeless—no, you shall not see it, it is a son's grief sacred to his mother. He says he comes but to rest a broken heart on mine, a heart mortally wounded. But Paul, as you shall see, says he is not angry now when he speaks to him of it, answering as if it

might be. And he does not speak of the English girl."

"*That* is a *bad* sign," remarked Mde. de Chatterie; the story of that wedding was no secret to her; indeed through her its likelihood had come to M. de Fourrière's ears. For her maid had a fiancé and that fiancé was valet to Louis and had a constitutional right to pry into his affairs. Therefore, when his master went on an unexplained journey to England, the valet left behind was able to explain it not only to himself but to his lady-love, who being partly in her mistress' confidence understood the importance of the information too well not to make use of it."

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"But he has sent her away," said Mde. de l'Aubonne eagerly; "he does not even know where she has gone."

"Somewhere where he will be able to find her when he chooses to look, be sure" returned the other.

"That, no doubt," said Mde. de l'Aubonne scornfully, thinking of the bold girl who had so nearly entrapped her son. But she added, repenting a little of her hard thoughts, "After all, poor girl, one must be sorry for her; she must have loved Louis for his own sake besides you see, and it must have been a dreadful parting for her when he sent her away at the last moment; poor girl!"

"Poor girl!" laughed Mde. de la Chatellerie, "and if she entraps your son again after all?"

"If she does—" M. Fourrière began to menace.

Mde. de l'Aubonne made haste to stop him—"Louis has promised Paul—it was the only time they mentioned her since—look Paul says thus—" "I said to him, 'Thank me no more or I shall quarrel with thee—only, if thou wilt reward me as thou shouldst, promise me not to seek that girl any more.' And he promised me quite quietly, I assure thee, my dear mother. And, thou knowest it well, he keeps his promises. The sting of the whole matter to him, for love does not kill, is that he fancies he has not acted honourably towards that adventuress. As if one should

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talk of honour towards a person of the sort. But thou mayst rest satisfied that her nets are fairly broken."

"Then we shall see soon," said the old man more contented.

"Yes? It remains to be seen," said Mde. de la Chatellerie doubtful still.

"Ah! I hope all will go well: it would make me so happy," said the gentle lady with tears in her eyes. "If you knew what I have suffered! My poor Louis!"

Mde. de l'Aubonne had a kindly liking towards Stephanie: for the sake of her gentleness and goodness she would gladly have had her for her daughter-in-law, as well as for the advantages of the match. She kept the girl by her side as she walked homewards with her and her mother as far as their ways went together, and talked to her of the goodness and cleverness of Louis—and indeed, (for how could she do otherwise?) of both her sons, and of the cruel fear she had had about her son's death-danger. Stephanie listened with interest but not quite as was intended, she was

all sympathy for the fear and the danger as to Louis, but when the goodness and the cleverness were talked of she cared a little the most to hear of Paul's. It did not matter much, she would do what she was told.

CHAPTER XIII.

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LOUIS came home. He looked very much changed, he was pale and haggard, and, if he had seemed grave beside the rapid Paul before, now he seemed morose. The gloom of his thoughts when he did express them was painful, but he was of reticent nature and on the whole, though accustomed to be confidential with Paul and confessing with his mother, of reticent habit, and now even they were allowed to know but little of what was passing in his mind. The wicked siren whom Paul loathed in his heart was never mentioned between them. That whole perplexed affair was made a great forget of—Louis had had a dangerous illness, that was all.

In body he soon grew stronger, but in mind

his chief feeling was one of weariness, a rest-longing. He was dissatisfied with himself and of course still more dissatisfied with the world, which is always to blame for the ill consequences of a man's vagaries—it was heartless, it was hollow, it had no room for love, no time to pause and turn aside from crushing a fainting heart; it was terribly cruel and he was the victim of a harsh destiny. He was very bitter against it and scoffed at its ways with a most biting cynicism. He dared not think about the last few months of his life—his love for Lesley indeed had gone to sleep and it was not that he was afraid of rousing, but it was his shame and remorse. These were always struggling to awake, and, though he managed to turn his mind from them, there is nothing more fatiguing mentally than that victory over a thought which you will not have with you but which you tacitly feel is always at hand ready to assault you again if you once relax your vigilance. He wanted some new interest to grow up in its place and kill it out, but instead of that as time went on there yawned all the more a

great void in his life, and it was very cold and dreary within and he wanted something—and for what he knew something might be some one—to help him to warmth and rest.

By-and-by he found that something did mean some one: and some one might as well be Stephanie. She was moved with sympathy for him now that he looked so worn and pale and sad, she felt too that something more than his illness must have done all this, and she felt the woman's longing to comfort the unhappy, and therewith the woman's power to do it. That changed her position towards him—now that she had to that extent a superiority over him she was not afraid of him, and, though for maiden decorum she could not yield to her impulse and come into his life with a pitying tenderness, her manner to him grew at once bolder and softer. She had kind eyes for him now and her answers, that might not of course be longer or less circumspect than before, had a touch of interest in them somehow that made him answer them again. So he came to talk to her sometimes and began to notice that

kind of beauty under her plainness of which I have spoken. Stephanie, who was neither brilliant nor sage, had a certain winningness in her talk; and the council had decided that since Louis could not be dealt with like other young men it might be wise in this case for Madame de la Chatellerie to be a little less demonstrative of her surveillance than would be desirable in general; so with lessened restraint this quality developed. Of course she never was out of her mother's sight and not often out of reach of her hearing, but that strict guardian nevertheless allowed it to be perceived that she did not always give heed to their proceedings.

"Then thou wilt marry the little Stephanie at length?" said Paul approvingly to his brother.

"I do not know—it might be. I want rest, and there is a feeling of rest in being with her—she is gentle, she is modest, somehow in spite of her plainness she does not displease. But I do not love her—no, I shall not marry her. Take her, thou, I think thou couldst contrive to be content with her."

"I think I could contrive to be content with her, yes, the little one has pleasant looks; but I do not think Monsieur and Madame her prudent parents could contrive to be content with me," said Paul, and went off, well pleased, to tell his mother that matters were going at the best.

Louis sat down to think over it. Perhaps that would be the best end of it. He had had exalted ideas once about marriage, he had thought his wife should be his love, all the charm of sentiment should cling about his home, there he would pass the happiest hours of his life, *he* would not have to seek for companionship out of doors nor look for the fairest graces of woman's society among the houris of fashionable circles, the woman who was always near him should be the one he would most have cared to follow if she had not been.

But he was disillusioned now—in the world (the world of society you understand) this idyllic domesticity could not be realized, a man could not marry a woman merely because she was in herself the one of all others to suit him—the cruel

rigours of life forbade that—and if he married some other she could never be the heroine of the idyll. “Another dream vanished!” he sighed angrily, “when will the period of awakening be over? I long to be old.” And he resigned himself to his new perception—marriage and romance were incompatible.

And, since this was admitted, what of Stephanie?

Yes, perhaps that would be the best end of it.

These were the question and answer he pondered backwards and forwards. They changed places sometimes and they blended vaguely with each other, but they fell on nothing contradictory.

This was not the first time that he had thought over this matter, but it was the first time with a result. In the evening he said to his mother—sitting alone with her in her own room, where it had been his longed-for treat to be with her when he was a child and where now that he was a man it was hers to see him by her side—“My mother, thou hast ceased to persuade me to marry Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie?”

“To persuade, yes—to wish it no.” Then she

smiled and added, "I ceased to persuade thee because I thought that—that—"

"That I was obstinate and that I should do a thing more readily because thou didst not urge it? Oh, thou hast not thought kindly, *bonne mère*," said Louis reproachfully.

"No, not that, my son," answered the gentle lady, "but it was as if thy own thoughts began to go with mine, and so it was wiser to let them ripen. Thou knowest *I* would not urge thee to what seemed disagreeable to thee—I could have consented even and brought thy father to consent to—"

"I know it. I always counted on thee."

"Yes," said Madame de l'Aubonne half pleased and half shamed, "my sons know how weak their mother is. Were it not for Monsieur de Fourrère!"

"But now," she resumed, "thou wilt ask for Stephanie from her parents?"

"Listen my mother. I see now that it would be best for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie—with her it would be a calm life, good for

a weary man. But, my mother, I have been very selfish when I loved and now that I have no passion to blind me I would not be selfish still. I would not marry this girl to have her unhappy and I can see that she will not love me.—Were it Paul—”

“Paul! They would never give her to him. My Paul—a woman might well love him, but he is too poor for her.”

“I know it, I do not speak of it as if it could be. But if they married her to me against her will?”

“It will not be against her will, Louis; she is dutiful and she is modest and amiable, she will love him who is chosen for her husband and not any before.”

“Tell me, my mother, *truly*, wast thou happy?”

“I was contented. At first it seemed to me a little sad,—your father was so many years older than I, he seemed already an old man and I was little more than a child: but then I revered him much, and thou knowest how generous he was, he took me from my mother in her first

widowhood when all our fortune was gone; I had no dowry, dost thou know that? For your sakes I have sorrowed for it."

"Yes, my mother, I know it and I have thought how wisely he did in marrying thee instead of some richer person. Who would have cared for him in his infirm years as thou hast done?"

"I do not say so, Louis. Why should not a rich woman have done her duty as faithfully? I should have been as I am if I had brought a fortune with me should I not? And my being portionless was an evil, it prevented my having any influence over your father, I could not restrain his expenditure of a fortune to which I had added nothing, and I could not resist it when he—I must not speak to my sons of their father's faults."

"Afterwards?—after the first days of marriage? was it happy for thee?" asked Louis carrying on the subject still.

"Yes I have been very happy, I had my mother's happiness, I had you, Paul and thee Louis."

A little bell hung over the door began to vibrate and tinkle—Madame de l'Aubonne rose. "See your father is awake and needs me." But she turned back, as she was leaving the room, to say, "Yet remember my son if Stephanie should be given thee it is better for her than it was for me; thou art but of her age, thou art what she could love with the romance a young woman dreams of. Do not fear for her happiness."

She went away with those words and Louis was left to a return of his thoughts of the morning and to the feeling that he had taken the first step in this matter now that he had of his own accord discussed it with his mother and in a tone which left her to infer his consent. He was glad to fancy that he had gone far enough to engage himself to a distinct course—there is no greater comfort to a wavering man than to find himself adventitiously propelled towards one of the paths at his option—and now that this marriage looked like a certainty it became evident to him that it was the best thing which could happen to him under the circumstances. When

Madame de l'Aubonne's maid came to tell him her mistress could not come down to him again that evening his answer was in a little twisted note, "No matter, dear mother, I am decided. I agree to this marriage and thou mayest tell my father so if he is in a state to understand thee. To-morrow we will act in it."

Madame de l'Aubonne folded her hands and thanked God when she had read the note. Louis because he was unhappy was for the time her favourite son—such favourite as she, who when she spoke to one son in her familiar French always said *your* father and not *thy* because she thought at the same time of the other son, could have—and now his fortune and, as she hoped, thinking much good of little plain Stephanie, his moral happiness were assured. Anxious and wearying months had the last two or three been to her on his account, and this would make amends for all.

"Very well," muttered the decrepit half doting invalid to whom with infinite effort and explaining she communicated her eldest son's message, "so

he has come to his senses. He has my permission, madame." And so, having asserted an authority of which he was jealously tenacious although his memory and comprehension were so fitful that he had to be reminded of what his own wishes had been, he relapsed into vacancy with an angry crowing incomprehensible excepting that she knew it was a kind of scolding at her.

She did not mind, she sat tending him carefully and thought of her sons. And she still thanked God for Louis.

Louis did not change his intention. The formal proposal for Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie's hand was made on his behalf to Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie's parents the next day—but in spite of all remonstrances he clogged it with a condition. He *would* communicate it himself, and before any one else might do so, to the young lady and learn her wishes from her own mouth. If he found unwillingness on her part he should withdraw, he would hope that it would not prove thus, he believed it since her mother assured him of her acceptance, but he must be granted an

opportunity of ascertaining Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie's sentiments. He even insisted that his interview with her should be a private one—the restraint imposed by the presence of a third person, he said, would prevent his speaking with that truth he felt due under the circumstances to a young lady whose happiness he shrank from compromising and would add an embarrassment to her answering. Besides he claimed for her the right of this much freedom in deciding a question so momentous to her future. His ideas on some subjects were still influenced, through subtle associations, by Lesley Hawthorn.

It was through referring to Lesley's gentle self-respect that he failed to appreciate the impropriety Madame de la Chatellerie discerned in trusting her daughter unduennaed in his company, and inwardly fortified with this precedent he would only reply to his mother's remonstrances on his outraging that severe lady's sense of decorum by his inconvenient request that it was no very serious matter to relax the pruderies of formality for once, and that if the young lady's mother had

not confidence enough in her discretion to trust her so far he did not see from whom he was to gather enough to encourage him to make her his wife.

The treaty seemed breaking off on this dispute for a little while, Madame de la Chatellerie (head of the De la Chatellerie side, her husband being content to leave her plenipotential so long as he could enjoy himself undisturbed in Paris), considering M. Louis de l'Aubonne's request disrespectful to her daughter and to the family and giving herself airs somewhat more magnificent than the other two councillors, M. de Fourrière not disposed to have his project set aside for a point of prudery, and Madame de l'Aubonne full of pride for her son, could submit to placidly. And when they thought it expedient that Monsieur de Fourrière should, with great pretence of secrecy, communicate to her Louis's opinion above mentioned, the experiment at first had the most unfavourable results, as was natural, Mde. de la Chatellerie becoming altogether impracticable. She went home in high dudgeon, after having positively declined the proposed alliance on her daughter's behalf.

"Very good," chuckled Monsieur de Fourrère; "now, in order to resume the negotiation, she will be forced to comply with all we ask." In his discontent with her he had taken Louis's part no little, to every one's surprise, his own included.

He was right in his conclusion: Madame de la Chatellerie, thinking over it at home alone, began to hesitate about giving up the only satisfactory match that had yet presented itself for her daughter, and as she pondered the matter in all its clauses she seemed to find some reason in that offensive remark of Louis's. "After all," she said to herself, remembering what a very satisfactory match this only satisfactory match was—"After all, he is right that I ought not to have the appearance of distrusting my daughter's discretion. And his request is not so very objectionable that I should refuse the marriage rather than grant it. If it were done with the semblance of accident so that there should not seem any immodesty on Stephanie's part—and it need not be known beyond ourselves."

And in this fashion she proposed the question to Madame Lefort, who, also remembering what a very satisfactory match it was, answered like an echo.

Finally they settled that, as Madame de la Chatellerie could not without abasement of her dignity go and recant absolutely, the *dame de compagnie* should make the customary visit to Monsieur de Fourrière the next day without Stephanie, and proceed daintily to beat about the bush and see what chance there might be of dislodging the bird and dropping salt on his tail.

Madame Lefort did her work very well—the better, to be sure, that Monsieur de Fourrière was aware of her and willing that she should succeed. Between them they contrived the fiction of a compromise—the interview should take place and should be private in fact to Louis and Stephanie, but ostensibly public to the two mothers. It should happen in the De la Chatellerie gardens during a call to be paid by Madame de l'Aubonne and her son, of which an inspection of the beautiful rose-alleys that were the pride of the neigh-

bourhood was to make part: and Stephanie should not be prepared for what was coming. This last arrangement suited Louis no less than it did Mde. de la Chatellerie; for if she was anxious that her daughter's credit for maidenly reserve should not be compromised by her being supposed ready to give opportunity for such an advance, he was desirous that the young lady should not be tutored beforehand. He really wished to be fair to her, and to be fair he must be confident of the spontaneity of her decision.

The compromise was successful; the de l'Aubonne side was fictitiously held to have made concession by it, on that supposition Madame de la Chatellerie could meet them half way without derogation, and the treaty of marriage was provisionally concluded.

Stephanie meanwhile saw that something important was going on and judged that her fate was in question, but, as she still did not receive from her mother the expected intimation that Monsieur Louis de l'Aubonne had honoured her by asking for her hand and she could imagine

no difficulty which could arise if he had done so, she began to bewilder herself with conjectures and was nervous and frightened. In the day or two that had to pass after the compromise before a fair opportunity could be arranged for the stroll in the rose-garden she had time to grow confident that something in which she was concerned was impending, and the sallowness of her complexion turned into a dense pallor which made her think herself plainer than ever.

Paul out of his good nature would have liked to give her a hint of the state of affairs, but when he contrived a dim allusion for a first attempt she shewed herself so disturbed that he was in mortal fear of her agitation betraying him and was compelled to plunge headlong into the general conversation at hand in order to divert attention.

At length the time came—a beautiful summer evening rich with the breath of flowers, an evening made for a lover to woo in, and Louis, who, though not a lover, looked kindly to the one bit of romance this wooing was to make in his marriage, felt a pleasant tremor as he saw his op-

portunity nearing. He had just enough excitement to quicken his feelings agreeably; he liked the idea of the little episode, the scene in which he was going to play, he liked to feel that he was taking a generous part and the girl would respect him for it, and he was not much afraid of having to sacrifice his new scheme to her reluctance. Though indeed he was honestly resolved to do so if need were.

Stephanie walked by him silent and timid, her mother seemed to have found matters confidential to discuss with Mde. de l'Aubonne and by a look prevented her from pressing too closely in ear-reach of their whisperings. She could only follow dutifully at a little distance, looking at the ground and wondering why M. de l'Aubonne did not talk to her. Presently they came to a cross-line of path and rose-hedge only wide enough for one at a time; somehow Louis passed into it before her and stood; the two elder ladies had gone on along it, and there she was, barred out from them.

Stephanie felt very red and wondered what she

ought to do, for there Louis continued to stand looking down gravely at her and, turning her head aside a little, she could see her mother inviting Mde. de l'Aubonne to sit down in a small bower seat in the nook at the end of the path, a bower seat with scarcely room for two. But she felt all fire when he spoke and instead of offering to let her pass before him it was to propose that they should go on together along the main walk—in quite a different direction from the two mothers, though in their sight. She collected herself however to answer demurely, "It is along this little walk that Mde. de l'Aubonne and my mother have gone."

"That is why I ask you to come along the other, Mademoiselle," said Louis smiling at her perplexity, which she had not succeeded in hiding, as she flattered herself. "See, it is wider, two can walk in it with ease."

"But Madame de l'Aubonne and my mother"—Stephanie began again.

"Mademoiselle Stephanie, stay with me only a few moments," said Louis earnestly; "let me speak

to you—a few words only, but important words—I—”

“But Mde. de l'Aubonne and”—Stephanie, as she spoke, was trying to make a *détour* round a rose bush and pass onwards.

Louis interrupted her promptly: “I have permission, Mademoiselle, to ask you to listen to me here this evening in your mother's sight but not in her hearing. See, I will stand aside a moment; if she disapproves of your staying with me she will make you some sign, will she not? Look then.”

They made the trial; Mde. de Chatellerie looking straight towards them seemed unconscious of them.

“Now you will listen to me, will you not?” said Louis gently; “you have your mother's authority for it.”

“Yes, I will listen,” answered Stephanie trembling.

“Thank you, Mademoiselle.” And Louis, not quite so apt in his part as he had imagined, paused to find a fit beginning. She waited, pulling the roses to pieces.

"Mademoiselle," began Louis, "I speak in justice to you only. I have asked for a great boon from your parents, I have ventured to ask them to give me your hand."

A pause.

"I have ventured to ask it though I do not presume to call myself worthy of it, but I have resolved not to make you the sacrifice to my interests; it is for you to answer my request; you are free, perfectly free, to repulse me—or if you will, Mademoiselle, to allow me to hope that you do not think too ill of me to trust me with the care of your happiness. It is to *you* that I come for my answer."

A pause.

"Mademoiselle, do you allow me?" He took her hand, which she hastily withdrew—luckily, for Mde. de la Chatellerie observed the proceedings. Another pause.

"Mademoiselle—Stephanie—is there no answer for me?" said Louis, in his tender reproachful voice.

"And my parents?" asked Stephanie all at once looking up at him.

"They have given their consent."

"Then how can I be called free to choose? she asked coldly. "Their decision *must* be mine."

"No—I swear it—if you are unwilling I leave you free, free without blame or anger."

"And they?"

He was puzzled for a moment; the gentleness of Mde. de la Chatellerie, if her daughter crossed her wishes, was more than he could answer for.

"I thought so," she said quietly.

"No, but you are wrong, quite wrong," he explained now eagerly. "They have allowed you freedom; it was my condition—they have pledged themselves to leave my acceptance with you."

"Because they feel sure I shall obey their wishes—I must obey them," she said. "Do you not see that I am even now receiving their commands through you? What do you think they would say to me if I rejected the person whom they had thought right for me?"

"But I will take care—I will make the blame mine," he answered earnestly.

"You promise?" she said, with one of those expressive looks.

"Yes, I promise—solemnly," he answered with increased earnestness, moved by that sudden gleam of beauty. "Believe that you are free, and only let me plead my cause."

It was half won by that promise—not her love, mind, but his cause, which was to be gained with something less than that—it was half won, and he saw it and grew eloquent. He told her that he did not love her, but as he told it it seemed a flattery rather than a slight; and he told his story truly and without gloss, he thought—yet if Lesley Hawthorn had been there to tell it the account would not have sounded quite so favourable to him, anxious as she was to spare him from even her own blame. Somehow as he put it Stephanie, while she blamed him somewhat, yet thought the better of him for it.

And then he told her of his loneliness, his unhappiness, his wearings and angers at the hard unloving world. He told her how he yearned for rest and felt she could give it him. Stephanie's

eyes grew large with tears ; suddenly, by an involuntary movement, she placed her hand in his.

"Dear Stephanie," he murmured tenderly, pressing it. But that pressure seemed to recall her to herself, the momentary enthusiasm was gone, and she drew the trembling hand away again.

"Listen," she said. "If I were compelled to marry you I could do it without repugnance. I think I could learn to love you. But since I am left free to choose, I dare not say I love you enough now. Grant me a little time for the decision."

Louis felt mortified. "As you will, Mademoiselle. I am bound to obey you."

"Are you angry," she said, with an appealing look, "that I ask for a little delay? Think how strange this is to me, how unprepared I am. And so much depends on it to me—all my life."

"No, I am not angry, dear Stephanie," he replied, repenting of his ill humour. "You are right—and I thank you for being so merciful to me."

"And you will do the best for me with mama?" she asked timidly.

"Yes, have no fear." He promised boldly; but he remembered afterwards that he had undertaken no light task when he made sure of contenting Mde. de la Chatellerie with that result to the conference. However it was done, he would make the best of it.

"Will you go to her now?" suggested Stephanie, anxious to close the conversation and run with her new emotions to the refuge of her own room.

Louis thought it might be best, but as he went he lingered to arrange his report, with a view to securing Stephanie from molestation. He brought it out in this fashion: "I have everything to rejoice at in the way in which Mlle. de la Chatellerie has received me. I have said that she is to give me her final answer in a little while; and in the mean time I prepare myself for the honour of being allied to the family of Madame before the close of the year."

Mde. de la Chatellerie did not quite like the delay in the answer, but it was for a short time only after all, and, as he had put it, it seemed but a slight matter; and as she saw the marriage

was at any rate not to be immediate—and she could not very well require that it should take place before the intended bridegroom wished it—she thought best to accept the arrangement with a good grace. It would have been very different if she had thought Stephanie had left her eventual consent really doubtful ; but, as Louis had contrived, she looked on it as merely a show of reserve which would seem all the more dignified in her daughter.

“And Madame will kindly consider that my conversation with Mademoiselle her daughter was under the seal of confidence,” Louis farther suggested and met with a favourable answer. But he need hardly have taken that precaution, there was too little sympathy between mother and daughter for Stephanie to be likely to betray the feelings he had shown her there, or for Madame de la Chatellerie to care to question her on a subject of which she believed that she knew the result. It was for Stephanie's sake chiefly that he had asked for that promise, however, and she at least felt more secure on the strength of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

REHEARSING AN OLD LESSON.

AFTER that evening's talk in the rose-garden Stephanie shrank from Louis; she was afraid of seeming to wish to win his love—in truth because she was conscious of a half-wish that she might win it—and she was ashamed to remember in his presence that she was teaching herself to be glad that he was to be her husband.

She used to turn pale and red and tremble when she met him. Louis perceived it and was pleased. It was gratifying to excite this emotion in the quiet girl, and he thought of her tenderly, touched by the conviction growing on him of her secret devotion to him. And, though the fact was that he over-interpreted the signs, not making allowance for mere maidenly tremor in

Stephanie's unusual position and not understanding the morbid sense of unloveliness that kept her full of fear yet so grateful for any show of affection, he was right in believing that she was being drawn to him by something more than obedience to her parent's wish. So the more she shrank from him the better contented he was with her, and when he found her eyes shun his more and more and her speech grow more reluctant and hesitating, he said to himself, "I have done wisely, this poor ugly Stephanie loves me—and she seems almost to grow pretty with it! If this goes on I shall be really in love with her."

He took her hand one evening—they were walking behind Paul and Mde. de la Chatellerie, pretty far behind, too, as they were apt to do now—she snatched it from him crimsoning hotly. "Then will you not soon give me that right?" he asked her in a pleading voice.

But Stephanie was struggling with a choking sensation in her throat. Presently she turned on him, "You are cruel—cowardly! You insult me because I am ugly."

"Stephanie!" he answered, "you are not beautiful, but the oftenest you seem so to me; for there is a grace independent of contours and tints, and you possess it. When you look softly towards me I feel as if you were beautiful."

Her heart beat quickly, it was the first compliment in her life which had made her flush with pleasure—always before it had been with pain—for this one she could receive as spoken in gentle truth; if he had told her she was in fact not plain she would have felt as if he had struck her. She faltered and dared not again raise her eyes to his, which she felt (not altogether sorry to feel it) were intent upon her.

"You wrong yourself," he whispered, "but I — have I offended your reserve? Forgive me."

And Stephanie, the daughter of the punctilious Mde. de la Chatellerie, the pupil of the correct Mde. Lefort, actually replaced in his the hand she had withdrawn. But she looked at him so imploringly when he would have retained it that

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l, and stood with tightly clasped hands, ex-
ant.

Is it not so? Your hand was in his this even-
' reiterated her mother.

Yes," faltered Stephanie, clasping her hands
tighter.

at the scolding did not come. "Go then,
l, it is bed-time and you look pale. I will
nd to this."

ephanie received her mother's kiss on her
head and went silently. But at the door she
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her waist as she sat.

Oh, mama, can there be love enough between
and me for marriage?—his heart full of that
r person, and mine"—she stopped abruptly.

Stephanie! What were you about to say?

Heaven! You have allowed no immodest
ies of ill-taught young girls to enter your
l? You have not allowed yourself to think
much of some person not proposed to you
our parents?"

he felt ashamed to have tried to take so unfair an advantage of her impulse.

How Mde. de la Chatellerie could have contrived to see this little incident no one knows : walking on as if to walk were all her business in life, quite out of earshot, with Paul chattering industriously by her side, and without having been seen once to turn her head to right or left far less look back, she yet by-and-by showed a knowledge of Stephanie's little impropriety. Perhaps she was only with a shrewd diplomacy assuming the certainty of a guess in order to ascertain it, but at any rate, when her daughter came humbly to wish her good night in her room, she said, "You have then finally gone through the form of giving your consent to M. Louis de l'Aubonne. But it would have been more decorous to do it through me."

"I have not"—stammered Stephanie, "he has not again—I do not know if I—"

"Your hand was in his this evening," said Madame de la Chatellerie, cutting short her daughter's incoherent statements.

Stephanie dropped her eyes abashed and fright-

ened, and stood with tightly clasped hands, expectant.

"Is it not so? Your hand was in his this evening," reiterated her mother.

"Yes," faltered Stephanie, clasping her hands still tighter.

But the scolding did not come. "Go then, child, it is bed-time and you look pale. I will attend to this."

Stephanie received her mother's kiss on her forehead and went silently. But at the door she turned, and coming back hastily threw herself kneeling on the ground beside her mother, clasping her waist as she sat.

"Oh, mama, can there be love enough between him and me for marriage?—his heart full of that other person, and mine"—she stopped abruptly.

"Stephanie! What were you about to say? Just Heaven! You have allowed no immodest fancies of ill-taught young girls to enter your head? You have not allowed yourself to think too much of some person not proposed to you by your parents?"

"Oh, no, mama!" cried Stephanie, shocked at the idea, "No truly—I did but mean—I thought—whether I valued him so much as—I mean—"

"You talk nonsense, child. It is my care and your father's to provide for your happiness—you may safely trust to us. Now go: and do not forget to say your prayers."

Stephanie, who was already beginning to wonder in amazed mood whether it could be herself kneeling there with her arms round her mother, and to feel a little puzzled how to get without awkwardness out of so strange a situation, rose mechanically.

"Good night, child; you may trust to me," repeated Mde. de la Chatellerie, this time in a tenderer voice than Stephanie often heard from her.

Stephanie went to her room, and said her prayers—it did not need her mother's injunction this night of all nights in her quiet life to make her do that. The white Madonna over her bed, who took the mother's place in her heart, looked down on her long restless in the moonlight, while

she prayed the dear Mary to think of her and help her to learn the earthly love she needed that so she might win his who was to be her husband. If she could have known whether she wished or disliked this marriage she could have been easier she thought, but as it was she was all doubtful and afraid. The white Madonna was glimmering dully in the pale cold light that comes just before dawn by the time Stephanie fell asleep.

Madame de la Chatellerie saw Louis alone in a solemn interview the next day. It did not take long, but it was long enough; two minutes decided all.

"Do you continue in your intentions towards my daughter?" she asked.

"Yes, certainly, most certainly," she was answered.

"You have communicated them to her?"

"Once, as you know, since it was with your permission, Madame," he replied.

"And not since?"

"Not since, in the same definite manner—but as far as I could signify it—I had your sanction,

and therefore I have allowed myself to indicate to her—”

“I understand,” she said, as he paused unwilling to make confession, being doubtful of what he might be about to be called in question—“I understand. But I can no longer allow a romantic courtship which may compromise my daughter.”

“But, madame! I acted under your sanction, and I make a formal proposal to you for your daughter's hand.”

“You make it now? definitely?”

“Certainly, now, and definitely,” agreed Louis, thus brought to overstep his promise to Stephanie of gaining first her private consent.

“Very well. Then, on the part of my daughter, I accept it. I will communicate my wishes to her and it will remain for you to endeavour to make them agreeable to her. You will see my husband this evening when he will be returned from Paris, meanwhile I am authorized to give you his consent.”

Louis bowed and said he was grateful. There

was no more to be said. He was engaged to Stephanie de la Chatellerie, a plain little dowdy body, not very young (his own age considered), not very lively, not very clever, heiress of millions (in francs) and of the honours of an ancient family, with goodness enough for half a dozen beauties. He did not know whether he was very much pleased or no, but he certainly was not sorry. "And that," as Paul afterwards remarked to him, "is already much to say of one's marriage."

Mde. de la Chatellerie had said that she would communicate the news to her daughter and so she did in due form, but not till after the father's return that evening, so that Stephanie first heard of the recent decision of her fate from Louis. Perhaps Mde. de la Chatellerie was not unwilling that it should be so.

He had to tell her briefly, snatching a hasty moment when no one was near enough to overhear them.

"Your mother," he said, "has just granted me what I wish for most."

"Yes?" in the tone of a question :

"My Stephanie," he answered.

It was pleasant to hear herself appropriated thus in that low long tone dwelling on the *my*, now at last for the first time in her life to feel her woman's value to another existence : Stephanie felt a new happiness thrill through her, her heart beat violently but she dared not look up.

"And you?" he urged.

"Yes," she whispered and hurried away. Her mother and Mde. Lefort were approaching.

So it was settled, and Louis and Stephanie were formally betrothed. And Louis began to see a possibility of being once more happy, of even loving the plain little dowdy body who, he thought, "loves me so entirely that with all her effort she cannot conceal it." And Stephanie thought how good it was of Louis to condescend to an insignificant unattractive girl like her, and how gentle he was to her, and how patient and generous he had shewn himself. No surely, she need never be afraid of unkindness from him ; and if she did not come quite to understand him and were to dis-

please him at any time, there would be Paul, the kindest and cleverest and warmest hearted of men, to help her and tell her what to do—Paul who would be her brother now, so that she need not beware of liking him.

And the council rejoiced at their success, triumphing about it confidentially and prophesying a good issue to such a well-arranged union, an union as to which all concerned were content, not only the natural authorities but both the contracting parties. So well satisfied were they with this state of things that they even agreed to connive at certain lover like proceedings of the young people, conversations carried on in asides, lingerings behind and furtive deviations into side-paths, assumed to be accidental. By means of these asides and lingerings and side-paths Louis and Stephanie soon came to be on the most promising terms for their future unanimity: they began to rely on each other for sympathy and counsel—and even, what was still more significant, for blame. How far off is love when two young people take pleasure in each other's censorship?

It is not *always* disagreeable to be told your faults.

It was an amusement Louis relished. Lesley had not known that he had any faults, excepting in so far as she was aware that "all men are sinners" is a universal proposition, but Stephanie thought him perhaps too impulsive, too careless of worldly wisdom, too romantic, "trop exalté" in fine, and she would tell him so. And as these were the faults he recognized in himself he attributed to her the intuition of love and from time to time remembered that Lesley who had seemed to see nothing but good in him turned from him for ever at the first perception of his fallibility.

For he dared sometimes to remember that chapter of his life now, not with long dwelling indeed, but gingerly, as you touch a healing sore, with a half-pleasure in the pain and a wondering to find it so much less than it was. And he did not feel so much to blame as he had at first, he could no longer account for the intensity of his former self-reproach. He did not, however, blame

Lesley the more, on the contrary he was persuaded that she had acted with propriety and justice, "not with generosity indeed," he thought; "but I had no right to expect the *heroism* of love, that is the mysterious gift of the few, the unhappy few." In fact he began to look on it more as the work of fate than his or hers, it was destined thus—of what use would it have been for them, puppets in the game which Le Malheur plays with human lives, to struggle against the resistless power?

"I blamed myself and her too much," he said to Stephanie one day. "It was my habitual exaggeration of which you sometimes speak—I see all *en colosse*."

"Yes truly, how many times I repeat it to you. But you were wrong also in what you did."

"Yes, wrong indeed! Add that my regrets do not cease."

"Poor Louis!" said Stephanie pityingly. "And you cannot forget her?"

"Forget her! never, mon Dieu, never! Ah! how

beautiful she was!—" He stopped suddenly, there was a troubled look on Stephanie's face. She did not dislike his lingering sentiment for the heroine of his romance, she admired it in him, but she could not bear his enthusiasm for the beauty, she was thinking "And I am so plain."

"Why do you stop?" she asked.

"Because I find no pleasure now in a feeling which *you* cannot share," he answered in his tenderest voice. "You can share my regrets, my inward conflicts, but not my admiration for the beauty of one you have never known."

"You understand me," she said, brightening up. "You do not suspect me of jealousy."—"And truly," she added thoughtfully, "I could admire the beauty I have not seen, imagining it from your praise, if I were not forced to believe it degraded by the expression of an ignoble character."

"You wrong her," he answered hastily; "do not continue in the injustice I taught you. Believe me, her very faults were noble, she was only too pure, too proud; she might have been a saint, a

heroine,—yes, a Jeanne d'Arc, but never an Agnes Sorel."

"Why?" asked Stephanie, who did not understand the allusion: it was not she but Lesley who had found him that translation of Schiller's fantastic apotheosis of the maiden warrior of France and read it with him one summer evening of that utter past.

"Well, after all, what have I to complain of?" said Louis—he had been remembering. "Why should the white dove soil her feathers by following me to the ground where I lay grovelling in anguish? And now I writhe no more; Stephanie—"

She flushed with pleasurable emotion at that pause and that look, but she implored in good earnest, "Do not say too much—I should believe *nothing* then."

"I shall learn to love you as I loved her then," he modified the speech she had guessed in his eyes. "And you?"

"I am no longer afraid in obeying the wishes of my parents," she said in a tremulous murmur.

"Then you were *afraid!*"

"I thought you would hate me, me forced upon you in her place, so unlike her, so different from what you would have chosen."

"Poor child, did you really frighten yourself thus, you to whom so little choice was allowed?"

"They understood our welfare better than we did," Stephanie said. "If only M. de Fourrière might live to see his wish fulfilled!"

"Why should he not? It is not a long time. September is already passing, the first days of November are not distant."

"But he is so feeble," she said with tears in her eyes. "It is strange they none of them will see it—and he seems unaware. But he fails daily, and he frets like a tired child."

"He was as well as usual yesterday.—And that reminds me, he renewed his offer of transferring the new fittings of the rooms he is having prepared for us at Chateau de l'Aubonne to his own house—mine that will be: it is a finer one, certainly, but I declined once more. It will decidedly be better that you should

be with my mother, in case I were away at Paris."

"Oh yes, truly, I would rather be with your mother. It would be melancholy for me alone, if you were often at Paris, but with her I should not mind it."

"But you must be with me sometimes at Paris, Stephanie. Eventually I shall reclaim the tenantry of our Hotel in the Rue de Bellechasse, it is due to the family name. We need not wait for your inheritance, Stephanie. M. de Fourrière's fortune will accomplish that without so much as knowing it. Paul must have his apartment there—he shall have the second étage—you must find him a wife with a good dowry among the friends you will have in the circle that will gather round you."

"One will easily do that," she said. "He will have plenty of choice."

"Will he manage to choose a more charming wife than mine?" asked Louis playfully.

She answered lightly, then more earnestly as he grew more earnest, presently with only assents vaguely murmured and silences. Suddenly they

had become lovers lost in that foolish lovers' talk which of all talk is at once the slightest and the most profound—profound by virtue of the underlying meaning it has quite independent of the signification of phrases and words.

"Mama is coming!" said Stephanie hurriedly, starting to a most suspicious distance from Louis sitting still in the rose-twined arbour nook where an hour ago they had agreed to rest for five minutes.

"Peste! always the mama!" Louis muttered between his teeth as he approached to a more matter-of-course looking neighbourhood. Then in a polite measured tone—"Nevertheless I must be allowed to contradict your opinion, mademoiselle: the influence of music upon the soul seems to me due not only to the happy combination of—Ah, madame! is it you?"

Stephanie's anxious ear, always quick to recognize forewarnings of the presence in which of all others she was least at ease, had not deceived her. It was her mother who came towards them with her most majestic slowness, head stiffened

back and right hand slightly raising her skirt draperies in statuesque pose, with nevertheless a troubled flush on her cheeks that betrayed a little of the actress in the stately gait. The daughter trembled at heart, she had seen such a combination more than once before and it had always presaged anger. She looked instinctively to Louis with a mute appeal for help, but he had assumed an air of urbane indifference; he was prepared to do battle in his own politic fashion, he knew how to meet Mde. de la Chatellerie.

It would be safer, as also kinder, never by pre-judgment to assume hardness in even the hardest of human natures at any particular moment; for there are exceptions to all rules, excepting to this time-honoured one itself, and when the harsh mind has departed from its rule and is softened for once, it is bitter to it to be forced back under the old unloving law and it grows the harsher for a sense of being wronged and misunderstood. The mistake is often made, and the interrupted lovers made it now; for if Mde. de la Chatellerie was not in a tender mood (a mood impossible to

her) at least she was not in a harsh one, and understanding their faces she felt indignant at a false accusation there and loved Stephanie the less for the alarm on hers.

"I came," she said to Louis, "that you might hear from me rather than from a servant news which will afflict you ; but—no matter, however. I have a sorrowful, a fatal event to announce to you. Death is even now removing from you"—

"My mother ! oh, my mother !"

Stephanie sprang towards him : never had she heard such a cry of agony. Her mother caught his hand. "Oh no, no, listen to me, not your mother. Your father has been ill, you must have known that his life had little security, another stroke and—"

"Pierre, Pierre," cried Louis, catching sight of the messenger who had followed her at a respectful distance, "tell me, is my mother?"—His voice was choked.

"No, no, Monsieur Louis," answered the old servant cheerily ; "madame is well, perfectly well ; it is monsieur."

He knew well that that was a very secondary matter, as indeed it could not but be: what had Casimir de l'Aubonne been to his sons in all those years? It was because Louis loved his mother for both father and mother that his first alarmed thought had been of her.

The young man sat down trembling, with a faintness at his heart still, but reassured: "Ah, pardon, madame," he said to the stately lady, dimly aware that she had spoken and he had not listened. "I was bewildered. You were telling me?"

"I was telling you that an hour ago your father was suddenly seized by a fit, such as that which first disabled him. They have sent for you; I have ordered your horse to be got ready; I would have you hasten, he *may* be alive."

Louis went: he did not need a second bidding. He did not expect by any speed to reach his father in time to see him alive, nor did he yearn for some last word, some blessing from that death-bed to take with him a memory and a hallowing into his on-lying life; but it was natural that he

should strain every nerve to the utmost in such a ride. In that wild hurry and still dazed with excitement he had not had time to think of grief—his own, if he should have any, or Paul's or his mother's. But when he had dismounted at the door Paul's white face reminded him. "Our mother?" he asked.

"She is still there, she is praying by the body. Louis, she weeps for him as if he had been to her"—

"Speak nothing against the dead, Paul," said Louis, and hurried up stairs to his father's room, to find him ashen-hued and rigid with a gentler nobler look on his face than it had known for years, and his mother kneeling beside with clasped hands and eyes too blind with tears to see the crucifix that shook in her grasp.

"Oh Louis ! your father !" And she rose and would have had her son touch that dead right hand with a son's farewell. But Louis shuddered and started back, the lifeless *thing* was terrible to him.

"My mother, come," he urged.

"One prayer at least, Louis, before thou goest."

He bent his head and murmured a prayer. Then he looked at her and she came with him.

"My sons! my sons!" she cried as they led her away. "Oh comfort me, I have only you on earth."

It is something to be mourned so truly as that dead man was mourned that day. What had he done to deserve it?

CHAPTER XV.

AN INVITATION TO A BALL.

THE first days of November had passed ; this was the day which had been fixed as the wedding-day of Louis de l'Aubonne and Stephanie de la Chatellerie. Lesley Hawthorn remembered that as she took her way from her old master's studio in dingy Rue du Gougeon to the fashionable Chaussée d'Antin. Lesley is not now altogether in the position in which we left her ; her artist promise has been recognized by one or two whose recognition is a passport to the talkers' world, which gives fame for the day, and thence usually to the buyers' world, which gives wealth ; already she is beginning to leave the prison of her poverty, she rejoices in a new freedom now that she is no longer burdened with incessant calculations

whether new shawl or new boots can best be dispensed with when both seem indispensable, and balancing whether additional parsimony in food or in fuel can best be borne and will most reduce the too great scanty expenditure. She has been able to gather a few comforts around her mother now, and for herself she has both the shawl and the boots; she is not obliged to walk to-day either, she is rich enough to afford a fiacre on an occasion, but the exercise will do her good and she has time enough before her.

Has she forgotten her love for Louis? Is the sadness on her face for him—or is it for the vanished dream, the lost trust? Does she love *him*, his living self, the man Louis de l'Aubonne, or does she love a memory, nothing more? How should one tell? It is not in Lesley's nature to forget past love, past pain; she has said before now, "such things cannot be forgotten, they were a part of the life and cannot pass away like the scenes of a play. The living past cannot cease to be—and if it wearies me, troubles me with the self-consciousness that only awakes through

pain, still I would not have it not so, as if a part of one's life could be wholly past—as if so much of life had been unreal and in vain.” She will never forget, but does the old love live on with the life of the present too? Her mother thinks it silently and sadly in her heart, the good Baudoyers think it discussing the matter sorrowfully at night over their wood fire, Simon Gueret thinks it watching her unobserved and sighing for the loneliness of the young girl who is learning to trust him like a fatherly friend, and concerning whom he may at times have a half-formed wish that she could learn to trust him enough to give the keeping of her future fate to him, too old for other than daughter-like love from her as he yet feels himself to be. Lesley could hardly say whether she thinks it or no; she has not asked herself, she is learning a lesson and it is too soon yet to put her hand over this new rule of duty and try if she has it by heart: for if not would she have courage to set about conning it from the beginning again?

Lesley walked on thoughtfully. That day, had

old M. de l'Aubonne not died when he did, would have been the wedding-day of Louis de l'Aubonne and Stephanie de la Chatellerie. There was text for sufficient thought in that, and Lesley never shrank from any thought only because it pained—it was even a kind of poignant pleasure to her to probe her heart to its saddest depths when she could without fear of undoing healing work. She pictured to herself now how it might have been this day, how she might have been thinking to herself as she walked, “At this very moment they are standing hand-in-hand”—“it is over, the contract is made, he is *her* husband”—“now they are receiving the blessing from the altar.” And she felt that she was sorry it was not so, that she would rather have had it over, have known that he whom till that should be she could hardly help thinking her husband had irrevocably barred himself from her, that she would have liked to be assured that, even if he would, he could never now come to claim her by virtue of the solemnity of that legally void marriage and urge her into a fresh one legally firm. Somehow by the delay

of this marriage she seemed thrown back into a state of suspense—she clenched her hand, disturbed as she thought of it.

“Has any one annoyed you, Mademoiselle?” asked Gueret, overtaking her.

Lesley coloured, conscious of being taken unaware and annoyed at her involuntary self-betrayal.

“No one,” she said smiling quietly, “excepting M. Gueret by not joining me before I lost myself in cross thoughts.”

“And since I could not know that by walking faster I should the sooner enjoy the agreeable surprise of overtaking Mademoiselle Lesley, I must be forgiven,” said Gueret bowing reverentially; “but *cross* thoughts! yours!”

“Yes, cross. But let us leave them, I am good-tempered again. Where are you going?”

“I should rather ask where are you going, *I* was almost at my own door.”

“And surely nearer it now,” said she looking round.

“Yes, Mademoiselle; but if I may have the

honour of escorting you?" a bow extra reverential.

"Oh yes, do, if you have no engagement. I am going to a Lady Leonora Hurst's, a rich Englishwoman in the Chaussée d'Antin, to make a copy of a picture for Mrs Raymond."

"You still make copies, then?"

"I do not intend it, but this is beautiful—a Correggio—and then for Mrs Raymond!"

"As a mark of friendship, I understand."

"No, no," said Lesley hurriedly; "not that, I wish it were, but I could not spare the time and she would not allow it—she pays me, pays too much, for my copy." She was annoyed, Gueret had reminded her that she could not yet do more than hireling kindness, and it was a sore point with her.

"And why should she not pay nobly?" returned Gueret; "you are still doing her a favour, for you can do more than copy now."

"I still could earn more by copying," she said gravely; "but yet I know that I shall be able to do something more than copy, and I feel as

if it would be wrong to be turned aside for money."

"True, my child. Do not fear, go on bravely; you are beginning to achieve your success. And now when are you going to paint me that Isielle you talked of?"

"Iseult," corrected Lesley; "I began—but—you know my idea was only—I thought of painting it for myself—for my own pleasure, that is, in the conception, and then I should see if any one cared to have the picture."

"And I asked you to paint it on my commission because I wished to see the idea carried out—and you refuse me, Mademoiselle Lesley?"

"Oh no, no,—but I do not like—in short," drawing herself up suddenly, "I do not like, even by you, to have a picture ordered out of charity."

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" Gueret's long face grew so much longer and he looked so disconcerted, that Lesley, penitent, made haste to promise, "I will set to work on it to-morrow, I will paint it for you; I see I was wrong, ungenerous."

"Then we are agreed?" said Gueret quietly,

only delighted to find she had forgotten that stipulations could be made as to price: the picture once painted he would take care to keep his right in it at his own price, however high she might think it.

"Yes," she answered; "and to tell you the truth," she went on in reply to his bow, "I have got some way with it already, for I could not get the fancy of her out of my head, and I was *forced* to carry it out though it was like stealing the time from Rizpah."

"You have finished that now?"

"Yes, the last glaze will be on soon, and then—I hope about that picture."

"You are satisfied with it yourself; I know Pierre Baudoyer is triumphant about it."

"Ye-es," she hesitated, "Yes, I am satisfied; it is not all I meant, but it is something. And the group of soldiers, about which I felt least sanguine when I began, has succeeded—they tell me."

"*You* do not know then, Mademoiselle?"

"Not so well," she said; "I never saw them so plainly as I did her among her dead."

"But that foremost one who looks at her so pityingly?"

"I saw *him*," she said quietly. "Oh look at that child's face—see—just passing."

"It is dirty," said Gueret.

"It smiles," Lesley answered.

"Surely Mademoiselle does not consider that so especial a singularity?"

"Yes, but I do—that real smile. One sees many lips curve upwards in half-laughters, in courtesy; but that unconscious smile which only a true nature has while it thinks pure thoughts that are happy one does not see twice in the week—or month—I think."

"Such a smile as, with all her sorrow, this young girl wears when she feels beauty and sunshine," Gueret thought to himself, but he did not utter it: he had too much real courtesy to vex her with a compliment. "You are right, Mademoiselle," he said, "such a smile is not common." And they walked on the short distance still to be gone, still talking amicably of her prospects and her plans.

It was not till Lesley was turning to him to bid him good-bye and pass through Lady Leonora Hurst's porte cochère that M. Gueret said, "I have heard, Mademoiselle, that the marriage of the persons in whom we are interested in Gascony is likely to be still longer delayed. M. de Fourrière cannot, they think, survive the winter; thus there will be an additional period of mourning to observe before it can take place."

"I am very sorry," said Lesley; her lips quivered a little and that was all; then she smiled good-bye and passed on. Yet I think she could hardly not remember how different it would have been now if *her* marriage had been yet to come, if that journey to England last spring had never been. For now, on M. de Fourrière's death, Louis would be free—would have been free at least.

"Oh I *am* so vexed! so really sorry, Miss-a Hawthorn. I *ought* to have let you know; how *could* I forget? The picture has been displaced in preparing for a ball this evening: I only just remembered before you came, or I would have sent to let you know, and save you a useless journey;

I am not receiving other visitors this afternoon, but I told them at once to let me see you that I might apologize."

So explained Lady Leonora Hurst anxiously as she received Lesley in her peach-bloom tinted boudoir, made more dainty than ever in honour of an approaching fête. She really was uneasy lest her carelessness should wound this refined looking girl's lady pride. But Lesley felt herself too surely a lady to be prompt to imagine slights; she accepted Lady Leonora's excuses with pleasant courtesy and declined the proffered refreshment and the invitation to rest a longer while, with her winning smile, "My walk has rested me itself—and I have not done work enough since I got here to tire me, I think," she added playfully.

Lady Leonora *must* conduct her herself to the end of the corridor; she could not think of leaving it to the servant: a door was open as they passed, and she saw Lesley allow her tempted eyes to look a moment at the beautifully decorated suite of rooms revealed in the glimpse and then turn her head quickly aside, annoyed at herself for inquisi-

tiveness. "Will you pass through these rooms instead?" she proposed; "it is pleasanter than the corridor, and there has been some trouble taken in their arrangement."

Lesley gave a willing assent and passed into a dream of splendour, as it seemed to her. Luxury and mechanic art, and above all a refined taste, had done their utmost here. How those draperies fell, round and shadowy and sweeping, she could have studied them for an hour; how subtly the delicate tints were harmonized from the soft-toned walls to the carved and gilded wainscotings; where the subdued lines of colour seemed like reflex lights from the velvet and damask hangings and couches. And what a radiancy of mirrors and pier glasses; and what a richness of rarely designed ormolu; and here and there, on tables and brackets and snow-white chimney pieces, were exquisite statuettes and fragile-looking Bohemian glass, fretted like cobweb lace—not too many ornaments, but enough to show the finished taste that chose these for some peculiar beauty or fitness, instead of crowding every available space with the many

that such wealth as you could divine here could have bought.

Lesley gazed delighted, while Lady Leonora, lingering on with her, enjoyed her sensitive appreciation of the effects her taste had planned. And at first the girl took in the scene with bright and unalloyed admiration: but in the last room of the suite a burst of sunlight which had broken through a grey sky was streaming through the windows and setting the prisms of the many faceted glass chandelier all aglow with violet and ruby and gold and lucent green, and Lesley was reminded how those crystalline branches would blaze and glitter again by-and-by in a glory of light that would flash, as it were, its own brightness into young hearts like her's and thrill them with a kind of intoxication. Lesley was peculiarly sensitive to the beauty of light in all its modes and changes. Then she thought how the music would ring through those beautiful rooms the while, and the dancers would be whirling and floating along, and girls like herself would be there in fairy gauzy dresses and drooping clusters of flowers, and she

would be sitting in her poor home tiring the eyes that wanted rest after her day's painting with darning the little rent in her mantle or sewing at her mother's new warm petticoat; and then when *they* had just begun to be at the merriest and to dance the lightest and fastest, she to go to her curtainless bed and lie there, perhaps awake thinking of—ah such sad things! She, the daughter of a gentleman, the descendant of gentlemen from so long and long back, was too poor and too humble to mix among these rich well-born people—they would despise her.

And at the thought she drew herself up unconsciously and answered goodnatured Lady Leonora in a stiffer tone—Lady Leonora, who meanwhile had been questioning inly whether she could ask this graceful Miss Hawthorn to join her guests, and, after deciding that there was no unfitness in the invitation, was held back by the consideration that she could hardly be ready provided with a dress for such an occasion and that it might give her pain to feel forced to refuse on such an account—and then besides that perhaps it might

even annoy her to be asked at all without the usual long notice demanded by ceremony.

At last as she took Lesley's hand in her's to wish her good-bye, she said, "I hardly know if I may ask you, but if you *would* do me the pleasure of coming to my ball to-night—under my chaperonage, if you will accept it, or Mrs Raymond's—I should be so glad to see you."

Lesley bowed, rather too stiffly, for she was taken by surprise in the midst of her inward pettishness. "I thank you," she said, "but I cannot have the pleasure of accepting your unexpected invitation. And then my mother—"

"Oh! I *beg* your pardon," interposed Lady Leonora; "I did not think Mrs Hawthorn would go out. I think I heard Mrs Raymond say she was not strong."

"Not very strong now," said Lesley, glad to turn the conversation, "but in good health I trust."

"But if she"—Lady Leonora was beginning when Lesley stopped her.

"Pray do not think I meant to force her on

your invitation. I assure you it would be impossible for her to accept it."

"But I hoped to offer you a little pleasure," said Lady Leonora deprecatingly, hurt at the girl's defensiveness. "Young ladies always enjoy dancing, and I thought you would at least know I only meant an attention to you—but you will not accept it?"

Lesley looked straight into her eyes. "You are very kind," she said: "and now I should like to accept it.—I will tell you the truth," she added, stopping the renewed invitation on Lady Leonora's lips, "I have not a dress—and I could not afford one even if there were time to make it."

How Lady Leonora longed to offer to supply this deficiency, but she felt she must not. "You are a dear frank girl," she said, pressing her hand; "and *very* soon, when you are Miss Hawthorn the celebrated artist, you will be sure to come to my next ball?"

"*Very* soon," thought Lesley as she went from Lady Leonora Hurst's—"Very soon!" It was a pleasant promise, and she was in the mood when

one accepts auguries unconsciously. But still she was vexed at heart; she was young, and the natural romance of her character threw a double charm over the pleasure she had been compelled to refuse. She was conscious of feeling cross; she had no inclination to the painting she was going back to her studio to resume; she was tired too. "I will take a fiacre and go to Marion first," she decided with herself.

Marion seemed cross too, when Lesley found her in her own room; Marion was Mrs Raymond, it should be said. Evidently she and Lesley were on familiar terms; for without waiting to greet her she stopped short in the midst of an indignant complaint poured into the sympathizing ears of her maid Gasparine: "Oh, Lesley! do just look—I am so put out! See, I have to go to this great ball in a friz of peony ribbon. Look at this thing!" And with contemptuous emphasis in her tone she held up the "thing," a mass of white silk dress luxuriantly festooned with deep crimson ribbon.

"Well!" said Lesley, in a gasp of horror.

"You *may* say Well! Did you ever see a wilder dress? Why, they'll think I've mistaken it for a fancy ball, and come as Madge Wild-fire."

"How came you to choose crimson at all? The colour does not suit you too well."

"No, and this shade is hideous into the bargain. But Gasparine says Mde. Claire proposed it the other day, and I said, 'Anything will do.'"

"And did you not then?"

"Oh, most likely. I know I had my head full of something else—but who could expect anything so terrible as this? If she had only sent it earlier so that it could be altered—if I had thought of it I would have sent to her to let me have it yesterday, in case. But I forgot all about the dress. What I *shall* do now I can't conceive."

"How odd you are about dress, Marion," said Lesley, laughing: "at one time you order it without even knowing what you are saying, and at another time you are particular—but to a miracle. Then sometimes you throw on your things and do not

even look in the glass to see what you have on, and at other times you are even absurdly fastidious."

"Well, it depends on whether my head is full of other things or not; but at my worst times, Lesley, you can't say you ever saw me go out with the wrong colours put together, though. But now what can I do with this?"

"Have all the trimming off, decidedly."

"Yes, but we've tried and it will leave marks where it looped the upper skirt, and Mde. Claire has no time to put on another trimming."

"What is this then?" asked Lesley, taking up a blue crape dress thrown on the bed.

"Oh that is for to-morrow night."

"Very well, why not wear this to-night? there will be time to have the white in order for to-morrow."

"Quite impossible—at least—I'm sure there are a dozen good reasons if one could only find them. But then, I couldn't when I had made up my mind to have the white to-night go and wear the blue, for anything—you know if you've taken

a thing into your head you must do it. I should be *miserable* in the blue to-night."

Lesley laughed. "Well, what is this scarlet tassel cord?—oh I see your *sortie de bal* string—Now I have it! If you were to send for cord like this we would plait it so, look, and loop the silk so"—

"The very thing! the very thing! Gasparine, send for it at once—go yourself. Here, we'll unpick these red things."

Lesley, amused, sat down and gave her assistance. By-and-by the scarlet loopings were successfully achieved. "You have made an elegant dress for me—that is the use of having an artist for one's friend," said Mrs Raymond gleefully.

"I am glad to find you think there is any use," Lesley said curtly.

Mrs Raymond looked up surprised. "Dear Lesley, you didn't take it in earnest?"

"No—I know," said Lesley. "This seems to be a bad day of mine—I have been cross for two hours, and this is the third time I have taken

offence without reason. I must go home and get good."

"Poor child," said Mrs Raymond caressingly; "you want a little recreation, that is it. I do wish you would go with me sometimes."

"No, Marion. I have told you when I am a little better off I will come to your parties; and if I make acquaintance there and they invite me that will be well; but I cannot go with you as only an allowed guest."

She would not tell her that she *had* been invited on this occasion, for she knew that Mrs Raymond would insist on supplying the deficiencies in her toilet and taking her with her; and she was not sure that she could be resolute against Mrs Raymond's insistence.

She had grown to love Marion Raymond in the last few months. This was how she came to know her. Not very long after she had been on that unfortunate journey the Baudoyers told her that a new pupil was coming, a beautiful young English lady, very rich, much engrossed with "le

monde," one might judge, and not likely to work much, but it was her caprice to study art in a real atelier instead of drawing-master's effects by private lessons in her own apartments. Not a pupil after Madame Baudoyer's heart this, but then she had proposed the arrangement with such a smiling certainty of its being acceptable that it would have been difficult to refuse her—and besides the terms were so advantageous. Pierre Baudoyer and his wife liked to put money in the funds, and the rich English lady would pay largely to be a kind of privileged pupil coming and going and working and resting as she liked. "You may count that she will do little enough," said Mde. Baudoyer.

Nevertheless when she came it was found that she worked with some application, in a flighty kind of way indeed, full of likes and dislikes to her copies, with an impatience of difficulties and with a petulant perception of her shortcomings that did not promise much for their correction. But it was remarked for the first few days that she always paused when Lesley came into the

class-room and seemed to find an especial interest in watching her.

After a little while she took a fancy to have her easel in the small middle room where Lesley still worked; she should get on so much better there, she said, that room was lighter and prettier, she should work twice as well in it and she would not disturb Mlle. Desirée in the least.

She hardly kept her word, however, for she had not been in it half an hour when she turned to Lesley with, "But surely, Mlle. Desirée, you are an English girl?"

Lesley looked up quickly from her painting; she saw in Mrs Raymond's pleasant face that she was not accustomed to find any one take offence at what she might choose to do—she herself felt inclined to like her. So she smiled and said, "Yes, we are countrywomen, Madame; I call myself English."

"But your French is not an Englishwoman's."

"My father was French; I was born in Paris."

"We are fellow-students, we ought to know each other's names: I am called Marion Raymond."

"And I Lesley Desirée Hawthorn—it is an English name," she added, seeing Mrs Raymond's eye-brows rise slightly. "My grandfather was an Englishman; he came over in the beginning of the Revolution, out of enthusiasm for the cause; and had himself naturalized a Frenchman."

"Strange for an Englishman!" said Mrs Raymond.

"I think not, if you consider the excitement of the time: many other young men were stirred by the theory of a pure and brotherly republic—he paid dearly for his political visions though," continued Lesley; "he suffered in the Terror, he and his young French wife together."

"And their children?" asked Mrs Raymond with interest.

"There was only one, my father; they had not been fifteen months married. The nurse contrived to take care of him and bring him up. There was no one else to do it, for his mother's relations all perished or were lost sight of. I have heard that the nurse told him his father and mother stood together and waited by the guillotine almost the

last of the victims, and the nurse held him in the crowd for his mother to look at when her turn came; she just caught a glimpse of him and pointed upwards; then the nurse hurried off as soon as she could for fear of observation."

"And what became of your father afterwards? You don't think me impertinent? I am so interested in the story."

"I will willingly tell you all I know," answered Lesley. "When he was still a child with the nurse he showed a talent for drawing, and sometimes kind people would give him for his little sketches money which was very welcome, for they were extremely poor. At first Madelon had passed him off for her son, but when it was safe she told his story, and the Emperor had him educated. He served for a little time, but he always cared most to paint (though he was brave and won his cross); and when the monarchy was restored he left the army—he returned of course, you understand, to fight for the Emperor when he landed from Elba, but that was not for long. Afterwards he lived as an artist."

"Thank you, it is very kind of you to satisfy my curiosity. I wish I had a story to tell you in exchange, but my grandfather and father lived at home and were comfortable and that's all. See there is my carriage come for me, *do* come and have a drive."

Lesley was very busy.

"Then next time you *must*. Won't even the Bois de Boulogne tempt you out into the sunshine?"

And for that time Lesley was left again to her work and her quiet. But next time she took the drive, and in a little while she was on friendly terms with her new fellow-pupil. The Baudoyers did not quite like it; they thought Mrs Raymond scarcely a worthy associate for their talented Desirée, and feared deterioration to her mind from companionship with one so much richer and doubtless so very much more worldly than herself. But Lesley chose to judge her new friend with other eyes and trust her own judgment, and her two old friends did not like to remind her how ill she had read character once before. Besides,

they soon saw that this intimacy made her happier, and after all there was no harm in Mrs Raymond; they thought no worse of her than that she was frivolous: so they left off grumbling. And as for Mrs Hawthorn, who was uneasy too at first, Mrs Raymond's first call won her over.

Mrs Raymond and her sister-in-law Violet had remained in Paris till late on into the summer, but then the heat and the burning pavements had driven them away. "We ought to have staid in Italy for coolness and not have come here till the winter," they said, and fled to Switzerland. Now they had been a fortnight returned and Lesley was again rejoicing in her pleasant intercourse with a female friend not many years older than herself.

"What a comfort Marion is to me without knowing it!" she thought to herself as she went home "to get good."

"I am growing ill-tempered, I think," said Lesley, as she sat down to the new petticoat at evening.

"*You*, Lesley!" exclaimed the astonished mo-

ther. "Ah! well, perhaps, poor child," she added in a lower tone.

Lesley laughed, "Thou shouldst not have agreed with me at least—it is only I who should say it. But, little mother, I do feel dull and dispirited at times, and, though I complain at being made idle, I think it is good for me that Marion has returned to force me to a holiday now and then. Sometimes it is as if I were not interested in life, but looking on it stupidly out of a sleep."

"Yes, I am sure she will do you good," said Mrs Hawthorn from her sewing.

END OF VOLUME I.

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